



Crashing Waves by **kittykatattack7**

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Summary: "CPR isn't the only kind of mouth to mouth I know, Princess." [Billy Hargrove X OC] [Season 2] Full Summary Inside

1. Summary

Full Summary

California had been nice. It was a reprieve from the dreary town Harley and her mother had just come from in Oregon. But once again Harley's mother got herself into a situation with a toxic man she couldn't confront. So she did what she always did. She ran. And her mother's trail of pharmaceutical addiction would follow. Harley didn't like running in general. But she definitely didn't like the idea of running from your problems either, but her mother thought otherwise. From Hawkins to Seattle to Portland..to California and back to Hawkins, Harley had a very gypsy-like childhood.

They picked up and moved so often she stopped making friends. But Hawkins was a place she had always felt more at home. It was where she had been born. It was where a distinct couple of people could actually be called friends. And of course it's where her Uncle Hopper now lived.

After a short stint in California, Harley and her mother move back to Hawkins where her Uncle is met with a shitstorm of problems from his younger sister who cannot stay clean off pills. The last thing Hopper needs is his messy sister and her daughter, Harley, coming into Hawkins when he has JUST finished fighting off all the evil from the Upside Down.

And he sure as hell can't let anyone find out that he is hiding Eleven.

When Harley arrives, she comes to Hawkins with a yearning for a boy she had to leave behind in California. She left her heart in the hands of bad boy Billy Hargrove with absolutely zero hope of ever seeing him again.

Until Billy shows up in Hawkins and brings a shitstorm of daddy issues with him that he projects on others in the form of violence and cruelty. Unknown to Harley, Billy took it hard when Harley left California. So their reunion doesn't exactly go as planned.

But with evil lurking in Hawkins it proves to be the riskiest and most

life threatening move of Harley and her mother's life. When the town is threatened, Harley steps up with her friends, and a reluctant Billy, to fight the evil off once and for all. With tensions rising and emotions on edge, Harley and Billy find themselves embroiled in Hawkins shenanigans all the while trying to tame the crashing waves of their hearts.

About

I'm completely caught up on the show but this first story will NOT contain spoilers from S3. It is set beginning of **Season 2** and we will make our way to Season 3 in the sequel to this book. It is also my first Stranger Things fanfic sooo please keep that in mind. I hope to do the characters to the best of my ability. I know Billy is a complex character with deep rooted daddy issues. *cries*

It will have flashbacks to when she met Billy in California! :)

This book will contain violence, gore, triggering subjects like depression, pills, and vulgar language.

I'm making this up as I go and have a general plot idea, but other than that it's fanfiction so let's just have fun with this, savvy? ;)

Disclaimer

I do NOT own anything Stranger Things. Their plots, characters and all that good stuff don't belong to me. However, I'm responsible for Harley, Lydia, and any other characters and storylines that are my creation!

2. Prologue

Author's Note:

This prologue is fairly long and you'll notice with my other stories I tend to write meaty chapters. This prologue takes place in California in a city of my choosing. It's set two months before Harley moves back to Hawkins. This will follow the S2 story line, but there will be some changes I make as I go along. It's fan-fiction so I'm just going to have fun with it. Also, we will get flashback chapters from Harley and Billy's two month rendezvous in California. ;)

June 30th 1984

Long Beach, California

The California sun hit Harley Hopper's skin and she smiled with a contentment that was rarely ever felt. She was a 5'4, fair skinned girl with daring red hair. Her shoulders and cheeks were littered with stray freckles, but nothing extreme. In the sunlight, she looked like a firecracker and she had a smile that created dimples in her cheeks. Her feet touched gravely sand beneath her toes. Her bathing suit was a two-piece high waisted gem that was all black with white polka dots all over it. The style was all the rage for the year. She coveted this particular bikini because the price tag had been more than her mother could afford. She had gotten it in the mail from her real father who lived in New York City and worked in the stock exchange. Harley rarely heard from her real father as he was super busy with his new family.

How could she blame him?

I mean, who would want to associate themselves with a pill popping ex-wife and a mouthy daughter?

She had visited her father a handful of times in her life, but never enough to form a connection with him. They were always painfully awkward. As she grew older, the visits became more infrequent. He sent her gifts two a year though. One for her birthday and one for

Christmas, but she had a feeling his new family had no idea he was sending gifts to her.

She found the California weather was a reprieve from Oregon, which is where they had been living three months ago.

She leveraged her white and yellow surfboard under her right arm, her left hand pushing a few stray strands of reddish blonde hair away from her face. Her oldest friend from Hawkins, Nancy Wheeler, would argue she had strawberry blonde hair these days with the lighter tones to it, but Harley would insist she had *red* hair. Her thoughts drifted back fondly to the place where she was born; Hawkins, Indiana. A place where she supposed felt more like home than any other place her and mother had lived at.

Truth be told, Harley didn't know what stability was. She was brought up by a mother who had a knack for popping pills and dating men that had mean right hooks. Her mother attracted these kinds of men like flies on shit. They would move from one state to another more often than most people ever traveled in a lifetime. It left Harley with deep rooted issues that made her fearful of getting too close to anyone. The same story would unfold in each state.

Her mother would meet a man and things would be nice for a time, but then both adults would start popping pills and using illegal narcotics until explosive arguments would break out from their high stupors. Harley had been on the receiving end of a few hands from her trashy boyfriends, which was her mother's cue to pack up and leave. The only semblance of being a decent mother was drawing the line when her boyfriends would slap Harley around. Needless to say, Harley and her mother had a very rocky relationship, but part of Harley felt responsible for taking care of her mother.

How beyond messed up was that? The child taking care of the *adult*.

Not even her Uncle Hopper could reel in her mother's addiction, and for a time Hopper gave up on her mother and stopped all contact with her. The last time they had made a pit stop in Hawkins her mother went to Uncle Hopper for money. It was embarrassing to say the least, but Harley could distinctly remember the pitying look on Hopper's face as he watched Harley shift uncomfortably while her

mother begged for money. It was actually downright mortifying.

Harley brought herself back to the present as deep laughter could be heard to her right. She gazed down in that direction on the beach. There was an old pickup and a spiffy blue Camaro parked on the beach. The group of people standing around looked to be continuing their beach party well into the morning hours. Soon enough the beach patrol would be by to start kicking anyone like them out, so she paid no mind. There were beer cans littered around them which indicated a night of drinking on the beach as well.

Other than the rogue group of party animals the beach was rather dead for such a popular surf spot along Long Beach, but she supposed it was better that way. There was a simple kind of calm that came with the early ocean surf. Harley wasn't complaining about the lack of people though. She inhaled the beachy smells and smiled. She had no idea how long they would be in California before her mother hopped to a new state, so she made it a point to surf as much as possible. Surfing was a way for her to do something extreme to rebel against her mother. Her mother hated when she surfed and said it was a dangerous water sport.

Harley basically did anything to piss off her mother.

Including, but not limited to, the time she got her nose pierced with a little silver stud, the tattoo of a small cassette with unraveling tape on the inside of her right wrist for her love of music, the line of piercings she had upon her right ear, the short shorts and the crop tops she wore that made her mother cringe. Her mother knew she had very little control over Harley because at the end of the day her daughter was the one that kept her mother afloat. Harley was the only constant in her mother's life, so she had little to say when Harley rebelled. The sad fact was that her mother could not function without Harley and because of that Harley was left to play caretaker.

She had left her mother passed out on the couch this morning from a bender without so much as a word to where she was going.

A note on the fridge would suffice. The last thing she wanted to do was wake her mother out of her prescription haze.

The squeal from a seagull made her peer over her left shoulder, bringing her thoughts back to ocean. The gulls were flying in formation, scavenging for any food left on the beach from the litter bugs who didn't know what a trashcan was. Harley smiled as a seagull snagged something on the beach and flew away with it in his mouth, his friends following him quickly. Her feet hit the water as it raced ashore from a crashing wave. She had anticipated the rush of water beneath her feet and instantly her body reacted with goosebumps. The water wasn't cold, but it surely wasn't boiling either.

She pushed her way into the water, wading gently as she maneuvered surfboard around so that she could hop on, now straddling the board on either side as she made way to peddling directly into the ocean. The swells were nice this morning, but nothing too risky. The sky around her was serene, and she relished in it for a moment as she paddled forward, watching for the time when she could make her move. In no time at all, she was standing with two feet on the surfboard, balancing and riding the wave before it crashed, and she fell within the tumble of the mediocre wave. She popped up instantly, and since her surfboard leash was secure around her ankle her board popped up with her. The Velcro felt loose around her ankle, but she paid no mind to the leash that secured her with the board.

Harley continued to ride wave after wave until she saw the one swell that would make for a nice ride to shore.

It was a barrel wave.

This was something she had only done once before when her skilled surfer friend, Sammy, was with her. She had only a split second to decide if she should do it or not, but arrogance overtook her spirit. She wanted to try it all her own.

I can do this without Sammy here.

She paddled again, getting into position as her eyes lit up with excitement and tinge of fear at the fact that she was going to ride the tube without Sammy present. She felt exhilarated as she stood upon her board, riding the crest of the wave with a smirk upon her face.

That is... until her morning went to shit and took a dangerous turn.

Harley didn't even see it coming.

Thinking back, she still didn't understand how things went horribly wrong, but she tumbled from her board, the Velcro attachment on her ankle was violently ripped apart. Her eyes and lungs burned from the sudden assault of saltwater in her face. She tumbled multiple times, the wave carrying her roughly and throwing her around under the water like a rag doll. The violent pitch of the ocean had grabbed her like a vice and wasn't quite done with her yet. Harley had absolutely no time to think as she was thrown around under the swell. Her body was long lost within the barrel wave as her limbs fought for control in the dangerous wave. Every move she made got her nowhere, and no matter how hard she kicked her feet to reach the surface she couldn't make it there.

There was a hard *thump* against her head as something crashed into the left side of her skull with a harshness that momentarily stunned her, blinding her already blurring vision from being underwater. The sharp pain radiated along her skull and into her jaw, as a black like veil started to cloud her vision and her lungs felt as if they were going to burst. Harley started to feel the moment when she was losing consciousness. With little to no fight left her limbs everything went black. She fell limp as the wave broke, leaving Harley's lifeless body to pop up a way's away from the shoreline.

Harley awoke an uncertain amount of time later with an unpleasant feeling.

Her throat was on fire as she violently coughed up water without any control. Her body seized and hacked up more and water from her lungs as her mind tried to process what exactly was happening. Her body continued to hack until everything was spewed. Almost on cue, her body started to tremble once she was finished coughing up water. From her aching head down to her toes she trembled. Adrenaline and shock became apparent in her emerald green eyes.

As her eyes adjusted to the morning sun a group of teenagers stood around her; three boys and one girl. Her eyes squinted as she tried focusing on everyone. The male face directly to her right captured

her attention. He looked to be kneeling over her.

"Give her some damn room!" The boy that was kneeling over her briefly cut out to the group standing around her.

They backed up instantly at his order.

"Is she okay?" The feminine voice from the group asked.

Harley's green eyes looked over to wide blue eyes that were staring at her. They belonged to the boy kneeling over her. His shoulders sagged in relief and his eyes flooded with solace as his attempt at CPR had proven successful. A few stray droplets of salt water dripped down the side of his face as he continued to watch her. Harley groaned in pain as her left hand reached up to her head, but a firm hand upon her wrist brought her hand back down to her side.

"Probably don't wanna' touch that. Here. Just relax," The voice that had barked orders before was now cool and casual.

Another boy with a ponytail came skidding up to the group, stumbling over his own two feet.

"I went to Dickey's Bait and Tackle across the street and called for help. Someone should be here in a few minutes. We might need to clear our stuff out if the police show up." The voice was low and masculine, but Harley had yet to really get a good look at the people around her. Never mind the fact that she was trying to comprehend how she even got to shore alive.

Finally, the face of the mystery boy kneeling next to her became more clear. He quickly pulled the soaked white tank top he was wearing over his head, revealing a taut and tanned body with black swim trunks for bottoms. Her eyes assessed the gold earring on his left ear and the mullet of curly hair. She started to slowly sit up and the boy aided in easing her up gently as he placed his white tank top upon the left side of her head. He pressed it firmly and she winced. Her body still trembled, and she hadn't realized until she sat up that her right hand was firmly grasping his left wrist for security and stability.

He glanced down at her hand but didn't say anything.

She quickly removed her hand and was met with those blue eyes boring into hers as he continued to press his shirt against her head.

"What happened?" Harley whispered with a scratchy voice.

"Pretty obvious, don't you think? I saved your life." A cocky smirk tugged at his lips and she huffed out a small breathy laugh at the arrogance that dripped from his casual tone. They were so close to one another. He smelled like nicotine and beer. She quickly made the connection that these were probably the kids she saw hanging out on the beach before she started surfing.

Thank God they were here.

There was a crease on his forehead for a moment as his lips formed a sly smile.

"Hope you don't mind I had to give you mouth to mouth." He offered as a ploy to try and get her to laugh.

It worked. Until she winced again from the pain. His eyes went to the wound on her head and he frowned. Harley pursed her lips and looked down before looking back up at the handsome boy who gazed at her plump pink lips as if he wanted to taste them again. Harley glanced up to get a better look at the group of teenagers. Her lungs burned and her throat felt like it was on fire, so when she spoke next her words came out less than feminine.

"Too bad I was unconscious for the show."

He smirked at her response and she couldn't help but curl her lip up in a small smirk as well. The pain in her head was irritating her and every time she laughed or jerked in the slightest her head started to throb again. The pulsating pains were shooting from her head to her jawline.

"So, what made you think you could ride out a barrel wave?" He asked with a raise of his brow as he pulled away and handed her his shirt so she could place it on her head with her own hand.

"Keep this pressed on until help arrives." He added.

Harley did as she was told and smiled while she answered his question.

"I have this thing where I don't always think before I do things."

He smirked at this answer, his mouth curling up as he averted his gaze for half second before looking up at the street where a medical vehicle and a cop car pulled up.

"Come on. Let's get you over there." He responded as the group backed up to give them space to stand up.

She smiled awkwardly up at them, averting her eyes back down to the sand from mild embarrassment at being made a spectacle of. The girl from the group handed the boy a beach towel she had been holding. He instantly draped it over Harley's body, taking extra care to tuck it around her shoulders. He looked at his friends and jerked his head towards where they had been partying,

"Better clear our crap up before the pig sees it."

The group nodded and started running towards their vehicles to clear out the alcohol from the night before. She glanced up at him now, giving his body a once over as the morning sun hit his sun kissed skin. He just so happened to glance down at her with a wry smirk.

"Admiring your savior?" He asked with a charming smile. A too cool for school look washed over him and Harley couldn't help but laugh lightly. It hurt to laugh, but she really couldn't help it. There was a rebellious look to those blue eyes and Harley knew without a doubt that her savior was *trouble*. She looked up at him again as the medical personnel started to meet them halfway.

"I was just wondering if my savior had a name." She mentioned after clearing her throat. He glanced down, a mild surprise in his eyes, but without even blinking he responded just as quick as the question left her lips.

"Billy. Billy Hargrove." His very tone held a cocky tone to it as if knowing his name somehow made her part of a secret cool crowd. So

charming, and yet so smooth at the same time.

"Harley. Harley Hopper."

"Like the motorcycle?" He asked as she nodded in confirmation.

"Cute name, Princess." He added quickly as an afterthought.

Before she could respond, medical personnel from beach patrol approached, and her mind became a complete blur as everyone started to ask questions and assess the wound on her head with gloved hands. They took out multiple tools to listen to her breathing and check out her lungs. Her heartbeat rapidly thumped in her chest as the onslaught of questions about the incident had overwhelmed her. The police officer stood by for back up, but when he found he wasn't needed for anything further he gazed out at the group of kids cleaning up with a stern gaze.

His lip twitched and he glared at Billy for a long moment.

The beach patrol cleaned up her wound so it wasn't oozing blood and she hissed when they blotted it with antiseptics. She watched as Billy's charming blue eyes darkened as the cop stared him down. There was a flash of danger in his eyes as he glared at the cop with an air of rebellion. After a few moments, the cop briefly spoke with Harley about what had happened before getting in his squad car and taking off. Billy visibly relaxed when the officer left.

The beach patrol thought her head injury needed more advanced medical attention than what they could provide since they were just beach paramedics, so they suggested she go to the hospital. They took off their gloves and eyed Harley sternly while taking Billy's white tank top off her hands since the wound had stopped bleeding.

"We can take you to the hospital if you'd like, but we don't recommend you drive yourself with a head injury."

She must have looked mortified because Billy stepped up and pointed to his blue sports car down the way,

"I can take her." He gave them all a toothy smile as they glanced at Harley with questioning eyes.

"Are you okay with this guy giving you a ride?"

Harley looked over to Billy as he cocked his head to the side at her. There was a flicker of something mischievous in them, something daring that made Harley nod her head at the medical personnel without even considering the fact that she had just met this Billy guy.

"I'm not hitching a ride to the hospital in the beach patrol-mobile. That's just embarrassing. So yeah, *Mr. Cool* over here can take me."

Billy's lips snaked up into a smirk at her comment.

After a few more questions, the beach patrol left, but not before giving her strict instructions to go straight to the hospital. They eyed Billy warily before heading out, but that was really no surprise. He screamed bad boy with that smile and devil may care attitude. Harley glanced at Billy and he jutted his chin over to his car and smirked.

"Come on, let's go."

She looked at him curiously as they walked slowly to his car that was pristine and shiny. It screamed *macho* and it had a definite allure to it that most girls would absolutely love. Harley admittedly happened to be one of those girls.

"A '79 Camaro. Suits you." She mentioned casually as Billy merely smirked.

"She purrs nicely too." He murmured coolly and Harley didn't doubt it for a moment.

He popped the trunk and handed her a large sized black Led Zeppelin shirt. He went to grab her beach towel so she could slip on the shirt, but in the exchange her fingers accidentally hit his and she felt a jolt that radiated from her chest down to her toes. He looked at her with surprise, his blue eyes widening. He'd felt it too.

"Thanks." She mumbled, carefully pulling on the over sized shirt over her head and smoothing it out as he handed her back the beach towel so she could wrap it around her waist. She didn't have shoes and her car keys were still inside her red Mustang that was parked in the parking lot.

"Will my car be okay up there until I get back? I mean, I don't even have my shoes..." Her voice trailed off as Billy turned to look, a shrug of his shoulders was all she got. When he noticed her concern, he rolled his eyes in mild annoyance, "It'll be fine,"

He paused and then smirked, "Now would be one of those times to *act* before you think. Get in, Harley Hopper. We'll make a pit stop by your car and you can get your keys." She found it very enticing when he called her by her full name, but she couldn't figure out why this made her insides swarm. He opened the passenger door for her, waving his hand in a very suave way for her to get inside. Before she got in she stopped and looked up at him. She eyed him with a guarded nature.

"You didn't have to drive me. I mean-you could have stayed with your friends."

She looked at his friends as they cleared out the area they had been partying in, moving quickly as they hopped into their vehicles and started to head out from the beach. The girl from earlier paused for a moment by the pickup truck that was about to head out. Billy made a gesture for them to head out and she nodded, hopping in the pickup and slamming the door closed.

He took a small step towards Harley. Billy wasn't intimidating to her in a scary way, but something about him made her breath hitch when he drew near. Her eyes caught sight of the necklace around his neck and she made a note to ask him about it later.

"Well, then I wouldn't have had the chance to get to know you more." His voice was smooth like velvet and she smirked, her eyes flitting to her bare feet and then back up at Billy.

"You want to get to know me more?" She asked dubiously as her brow lifted up in a weary gesture.

"Is that hard to believe?" He asked, that smirk upon his face growing intensely as her knees quaked at the glorious sight of the sun shining from behind him. It made him glow with a very ethereal form, despite the bad boy nature that radiated from his every feature.

"You don't even know me." She added with a wry smile.

"I'd like to though." He purred back.

"I can be trouble." She responded, as if that would scare him off, but he smiled wider and laughed, leaning into her as his voice dropped to a rumbling whisper.

"I'm a big fan of trouble."

He was so close to her she could see the finest details on his face, including his dark eyebrows, the curve of his venomous lips, and his soft skin that begged to be stroked. His eyes were like the ocean; beautiful, yet capable of disaster. She swallowed thickly before ducking her head down and then returning her gaze to him with a small nod.

"Well, I really don't want to stand here bleeding all day...so.." Harley murmured with a slight laugh to ease the tense moment.

Billy motioned for her to get in and once inside he shut the door and casually walked around to the driver side. As he hopped in and started the Camaro, her eyes lit up at the deep growl of the exhaust. He wasn't kidding. This beast purred. He quickly put the car into gear and glanced over at Harley as she tugged sheepishly on his black shirt and fumbled her hands.

"You alright?" He asked in a serious tone.

All playfulness aside, she could've died. It hadn't hit her yet and for some reason she wondered if it would. Her life held more chaos than a near death experience. This incident wouldn't really be anything that would rattle her bones or send her into hysterics.

"Yeah, I'm good." She answered quickly, averting his gaze.

He pulled out from the beach quickly, stopping momentarily so she could grab the keys from her Mustang visor and her black flip flops. Once she was back inside, he turned onto the seawall and headed in the direction of the local hospital. They idled at a light and Harley rubbed her temples for a moment. Her head ached, but she was just glad the bleeding had subsided. She casually rummaged through his

glove box looking for tunes, regardless of her headache.

She absolutely loved music.

"Looking for something, sweetheart?" He grinned cheekily before Harley popped in a Motley Crüe track.

"I think I found it." She answered back with a smirk. He made no mention of the fact that she had rummaged through his glove box, if anything he looked at her with an endearing gaze to his eyes. But then he quickly looked away, thumbs tapping the steering wheel to the beat of the drums.

The mid-morning breeze shuffled through her hair since his windows weren't rolled up. She felt her body relax immensely as they continued to drive. He reached for his pack of cigarettes and lit one as they stopped at a light, blowing smoke from his lips as casually as one would breathe. They stopped at another light as Motley Crüe played at a lower volume. The high pitch of Vince Neil's voice made her hum along, despite her headache.

Billy smirked and randomly spoke, his voice husky, "Just so we're clear, CPR isn't the only mouth to mouth I'm good at, Princess."

Harley couldn't help but chuckle, shaking her head and smirking at him as he smugly grinned back.

Oh, but his smile...

It probably brought many a girls to their knees. Harley felt her knees involuntarily quiver at the thought.

"I have no doubt about that, Billy Hargrove," Harley responded as her cheeks turned pink in response to his bold declaration.

There was a heartbeat of silence between them.

"Thank you for saving my life." She stated earnestly as an afterthought. Her eyes caught his and he looked at her stoically, an odd look to his face as if he didn't know how to react to her generosity. He stared at her as they stopped at a stop sign, and he nodded lightly as a peculiar look crossed his face. She wondered if he

was familiar with genuine kindness being directed his way. He looked uncomfortable for a moment so she spoke again to break the awkward moment.

"If you're lucky I might just need some saving again." She winked at him, to which he laughed lightly, eyeing her with a sultry gaze.

The Camaro's exhaust purred all the while.

"I'm feelin' pretty lucky." He added with a wicked smile before continuing to thump his hand against the steering wheel in time to the beat of the song, smoke trails blowing from the cancer stick in his mouth.

The next two months would be wrought with stolen moments, long nights of passionate make out sessions fueled by nicotine and cheap beer in the backseat of his Camaro, and finding out what lay beyond the bad boy facade was a lost, lonely and insecure boy who yearned for his mom...and most of all *love*. Harley had no idea that in two months time she'd be leaving behind this achingly beautiful boy to move back to Hawkins permanently.

And unbeknownst to her, she would be breaking Billy Hargrove's heart the moment she left California.

Author's Note:

I legitimately put on some Spotify playlist titled Billy Hargrove and jammed out while writing this. It was long, but hopefully we can get a better idea of how they met before I jump ahead into the present time.

More flashbacks will be peppered throughout the beginning of the story so keep a look out for those. :) I'm just starting, but hopefully I am doing him justice so far. Honestly, it was a bit challenging to write him OUTSIDE of the Hawkins environment. If that makes sense? I don't know, but I hope I did him justice for a prologue.

I promise it'll pick up momentum as the chapters move along!

3. Back to Hawkins

Author's Note: Just an FYI ... Harley does not know about the upside down in any way shape or form. Yet. She just knows Will and Barbara went missing and that Will "returned" How she knows will be explained in this chapter. The newspaper clipping reference is real but you have to zoom in on the clip in S2 to read the print lol I found it on Reddit. :) ENJOY

Back to Hawkins

September 6th, 1984

There was an odd feeling in the air of Hawkins, Indiana as the summer breeze rustled through her disheveled red locks. They had only been back in Hawkins for twenty-four hours, but it was evident from the atmosphere that the town of Hawkins wasn't necessarily the same as she remembered it. People seemed more guarded. A woman even gazed at Harley wearily while she ushered her son into the local pharmacy. Harley didn't live under a rock though. She knew why.

She had gotten a long-winded letter from Nancy Wheeler about Barbara and Will disappearing, and how her current love life situation was with the Harrington boy. All Harley knew at first was that two kids went missing back to back and Hawkins had been in a state of panic. She baby sat the Byers boy and his friends when she was thirteen, so it hit a nerve when he went missing. That was back before they up and moved to Oregon though.

Harley had later received a letter with a newspaper clipping from Nancy in the mail, which was currently shoved into the crevices of her shorts pocket right now. The clipping had Will Byers' face front and center, along with a crazy story about him disappearing, a coroner who had been arrested for falsifying an autopsy report, and other crazy accusations such as the Hawkins National Laboratory holding Will for experiments.

Nancy had been tight lipped about the subject when they talked every now and then on the phone about it all. Harley didn't feel it

was her place to pry and Nancy had seemed upset enough when Barbara never came home. Harley knew the grim truth that Barbara would probably never come home. Once people went missing for a certain amount of time the chances of them coming home grew less and less likely. Her heart ached for Nancy's despair, but she hadn't really known Barbara.

Harley had just been relieved to hear that the Will had made it home, regardless of the sordid conspiracies behind his disappearance and reappearance.

She barreled down the street on her Powell Peralta skateboard. The back of the deck was a purple color and had a nice sized open-mouthed skull plastered in the middle of the deck. The green serpent curling around the mouth of the skull was her favorite part of the skateboard. Her mother thought it was tasteless, but her opinions never mattered.

As she looked around she noticed Hawkins hadn't changed much, save for some new businesses, but nothing physically different stood out to her. Oddly enough, she felt complacent here and the hometown feeling washed over her. Her hair was down today, cascading across her shoulders and spilling down her back in waves of fiery red. The town held a strange atmosphere to it, but if she hadn't known about the conspiracies surrounding Will she wondered if she would feel the same goosebumps she did right now.

She'd chosen to take her skateboard into town since the weather was breezy and just right. Harley wasn't opposed to riding a skateboard around, but her favorite ride was her Mustang. She had deemed it the *Red Devil* and it had stuck ever since. Though her mother was duller than a butter knife, even she could be caught admiring the shiny red convertible from time to time.

Her right foot was currently balanced on her skateboard, while her left foot kicked the ground propelling her forward. She wore high waisted blue jean shorts with a cotton white crop top underneath her limited edition black leather jacket, which had been an unexpected gift this past Summer. She had stomped out of the house in her black combat boots, leaving her mother to frown and *tsk* with disdain at the fact that she left the house in a skimpy top.

Harley merely rolled her eyes before heading out.

Her mother was back at home with the movers as they unloaded box after box into their new shoddy home on the outer skirts of Hawkins near a farm. The place was essentially a dump, but Harley preferred it over being homeless.

Without warning, Harley had to quickly regain her balance as she almost wiped out on her skateboard. Harley had never been the best skateboarder, but a few in depth lessons with Billy's sister had really helped her with the fundamentals. The mere thought of Billy made her heart clench, her knees quiver, and a strange longing take residence in her veins. Two months with Billy Hargrove was all it took for Harley to allow the most unlikely of people creep into her heart.

He was a bad boy, sure. She had known that from the start, but there was more than meets eye with him.

She told him time and time again that her and mother moved around a lot. She had given him ample warning, and she had continued to tell herself that it was nothing more than a Summer fling, born out of hormonal desire and too much time on their hands. It wasn't anything more than that. It couldn't be. Harley had a way of keeping people at arm's length due to her unstable living conditions, but with Billy she had found someone that shared her parental issues.

They had a way of escaping the burdens from their unbearable parents and finding solace in one another, even if half the conversations turned into full on make out sessions. He was your atypical jackass, but he had a soft layer beneath him that she had somehow been special enough to witness. She tried not to allow herself to get that close to him, but she had.

His stepsister, Max, had taken a liking to Harley and the two had a mutual respect for one another. When Billy was being a jerk to Max, Harley was not afraid to call him out on it. For some reason, Harley was the only person that could tame the violent and venomous mean streaks that bottled up within Billy Hargrove. It was obvious where Billy had gotten his knack for being the way he was.

Harley bore witness one unfortunate night to Billy's father's hateful ways.

She had seen the way his father spoke down to Billy, grabbing him by the chin and jerking his head towards him so that Billy had to look his father in the eyes as he berated him for something inconsequential. They hadn't had the most perfect summer affair, but she had gotten an eye opener on the fact that Billy's home life was a direct result in the way he carried himself.

In the two months she had gotten to know bad boy Billy. She had memorized the curve of his lips, the smoothness to his skin, the way his mullet curled at the nape of his neck, the fidgety way his fingers rolled his cigarette around, and even the way his lips curled up into a devilish smirk when Harley said something sassy. Her favorite times were when Billy would lazily strum the guitar he had hidden under his bed.

There was no need for vocals when the magic in his fingers could produce a sonance of sound that only he allowed Harley to be privy too. He was no stellar musician, but the peaceful calm that came over his face when he laser focused on the chords made her heart flip flop.

Billy had been enamored with her since the day he rescued her on the beach, but she hadn't realized just how humanly possible it was for her, Harley Hopper, to become attached to another human being. The darkest parts of Harley felt relief that her mother up and moved from Long Beach to Hawkins again. Those shameful parts of Harley said her romance with Billy was only to end in disaster anyways, and that Billy would have found another girl sooner or later since Harley wasn't keen on putting out.

She had made it very clear she wasn't going further than first base with him. There was confusion on his part in the beginning, but as the days passed and he realized Harley Hopper was not going to give it up to him, he had eyed her with a newfound respect that she never saw him give to other girl's that would throw themselves at him.

Harley quickly regained her balance on the skateboard and forced herself to think of things other than Billy Hargrove. Or the way his entire demeanor grew cold when she said was going with her mom to

Indiana. They had left each other with a very less than thrilling goodbye. All the while, Billy grew distant the days leading up to her leaving California. He hadn't even seen her off the morning she left with her mother. It was all for the best anyway.

At least that was what she kept telling herself.

As she approached the Hawkins police station, she kicked up her skateboard, hefting it under her right arm and looking at her reflection in the mirrored door to the building. She pushed billowy strands away from her face, her lips pursed into a growing smirk as she was about to surprise Uncle Hopper with the news that they were back in town. He would be happy to see her, but she didn't think he would be happy to see her mother.

Harley flung open the police station door and the woman at the receptionist desk gave her a withered glance as she assessed the skateboard under her arm and her attire. Harley smacked her gum into a large bubble, blowing it out slightly more obnoxiously than she had planned.

"May I help you, ma'am?" Her voice was clipped, her eyes sunken into her head behind large round spectacles. She was your typical secretary with her coral colored dress that was had a modest neckline, her black sweater covering her shoulders like a shawl. She had olive colored skin and looked to be in her late sixties or early seventies.

Harley strutted up and popped another bubble, much to the woman's annoyance. She gazed down at the woman's nametag, vaguely familiar with it. It had been year's since she had stepped foot in the Hawkins police station but this lady looked familiar.

"Florence, is it? I'm lookin' for the Chief of Police." Harley stated with a broad smirk.

The woman looked rather annoyed at her arrival, as if filing her short, stubby fingernails had been important work before Harley had showed up. Her eyes flitted over Harley's face, her eyes widening ever so slightly as Harley's smirk grew.

"Harley Hopper. I'd recognize that red hair from anywhere. Is that you?" Florence whispered, a faint smile coming over her face. Harley nodded hesitantly as Florence stepped around her desk to get a better look at Harley. She put her hands on her hips and tsked slightly.

Lot scrawnier than I remember. Your momma feedin' you these days?"

Harley bit her pouty pink lips and had to hide the eyeroll. She didn't eat that well, but that was because they were living off scraps and hand outs due to her mother's inability to be an adult.

"I have a fast metabolism." Harley easily lied before adding quickly,

"I'm sorry, I only vaguely remember you."

The woman smiled before nodding her head, "Oh, no worries, honey. You were younger back then. Probably no older than thirteen, maybe twelve."

She paused before nodding her head towards Hopper's area. "He's back there. Go on."

Harley strolled to the back as she passed the desks of two officers who looked at her with raised brows. She sauntered past them silently, her imposing form getting closer and closer to Hopper. When she reached his desk the white walls immediately made her frown. The police station was stuffy, bland and smelled musty. The place was very boring in comparison to the California police stations, but she supposed since Hawkins was a small place it didn't require fancier décor.

She wondered if Hawkins even knew what the word *fancy* was.

Her Uncle was clad in his tan uniform, facing away from her as he gazed out the window, hands on hips with his shoulders clenched in the back. She could tell his shoulders were clenched from the way his muscles bunched together, which signified he was stressed about something. He hadn't even heard her footsteps approaching in her combat boots, which meant Hopper was far off in another world.

Harley smirked to herself before remarking rather coolly, "Uncle Hop,

you have been a hard man to get ahold of lately."

He whipped around at the sound of her voice, pinched brows drawing inward as his jaw slackened at the sight of his niece. Hopper blinked once and then twice as if he was having a hard time imaging this was real.

"Harley?" He asked as he walked around his desk, still surprised to her in the flesh. It had been years since they had seen one another, but the familial feelings of uncle and niece were still as strong as ever.

"The one and only." She quipped back, setting her skateboard down in the empty chair across from his desk. They wasted not a second more before Hopper and Harley met each other with a bear hug. He was not a hugger, but for Harley he found it very hard to deny. She pulled tight against him, smelling cigarette's and the faint smell of donuts. She let go after a moment, stepping back as Hopper regained his thoughts while he stared at his niece.

Hopper noticed far too often that Harley had the same eyes as his little girl Sara.

One of the roughest moments of Harley's life had been not only hearing of Sara's illness, but the aftermath that followed, which ended up with Hopper divorced and picking up the pieces as best he could with the heartache that followed from losing a child.

"Kid, please tell me you didn't come all the way to Indiana to say hi. You could have picked up the phone,"

"And is that *metal* in your nose?" He added with a scrunch of his brows as he inspected her face.

Harley laughed, throwing back long locks of red hair behind her shoulders as she followed Hopper to his desk. He ended up sitting in his chair and she hopped up on the end of his desk. He gave her an annoyed look as she shuffled papers with her bottom, but Hopper quickly moved them out of the way.

"First off, it's a nose ring and it's cool. Second, I did pick up the

phone. A few times, actually. The thing about phone's is they only work if the person on the other end picks up too." She remarked with a smirk.

"You always were a smartass." Hopper bit back, finding it hard to ever be really mad at his niece.

"Language!" Harley chastised as Hopper leaned back in his chair. She got a good look at him as he leaned back. He was still gruff with his facial hair and disgruntled eyes, but they softened for Harley. He still held his same shape, which was from too much take out and beer, but Harley wasn't in a position to judge.

She looked like a lean bean these days with itty bitty bosoms. Harley made a mental note to herself to eat more. Harley got what she could take as far as food and judging from Hopper's gaze he could see that time had taken a toll on Harley's bony frame.

She wasn't super skinny, but she had lost some weight in the past year. Not to mention the move from California had stressed her out so much she lost a few pounds just during the relocation process.

And from leaving a certain bad boy behind.

He sighed and she already knew where he was going to go with this next statement. "Your mom here?"

Harley nodded silently, picking at a stray strand of hair off her leather jacket and letting it fall to the floor. "We moved back. *Again*. We're renting a place out near Merrill's farm." She murmured with a roll of her eyes.

"I'm currently taking bets on how long we stay here. Wanna' place a bet?" She wiggled her brows and Hopper blew out a breathy laugh, looking away for a moment, but when he looked back at Harley his eyes grew worrisome. Harley knew the relationship her uncle had with her mom wasn't the best. If anything, it could be downright toxic because time after time Hopper would cave into her mother's whims of needing money or help.

Hopper was bound by blood to his sister, but she was a mess, and the

only person who could fix her was her own damn self. Not Harley, and surely not Hopper.

"How is she?" Hopper pried lowly, putting his right thumbnail into his mouth to give himself something to do with nervous hands. Harley didn't like the stress her mother caused her uncle, but what could she do about it? She was just the innocent victim caught in the crosshairs of the siblings.

"Same 'ole, same 'ole." Harley responded dismissively with a small shrug. Hopper could see the strain that relocating again put on his niece and he frowned as he looked closer at Harley, her eyes averting his gaze rather quickly as he scrutinized her with a parental-like once over.

"You know how she is, Hop. She's unhinged at times and makes split decisions. This time she got in bad with a sleazebag that was peddling more than just pills. Mom got spooked with his illegal activity and things went south," She paused and rolled her shoulders back to stretch them as she kicked her long slender legs against the side of Hopper's desk.

"Now here we are."

Hopper closed his eyes and shook his head as Harley popped another bubble with her gum, "Christ, like this is the kind of shit I need right now." He frowned as Harley ducked her head in embarrassment at arriving to Hawkins and bringing her mother's baggage with them.

"Hey, look kid. That's not what I meant. It's not you-I just-" He paused and fumbled with his words as he ran his large right hand down the length of his face. "I've had a lot going on here is all." Hopper bit out with a long sigh as if the whole explanation was too much to even get into right now.

She nodded slowly, biting her lower lip as she hopped off the desk without warning and pulled the clipping out of her pocket. Harley slapped it down on the table for dramatic effect as Hopper gazed at the clipping of Will Byer's and the story of Hawkins before returning his guarded gaze to his niece.

"Where did you get this?" He asked immediately as he picked up the clipping before tossing it back on his desk carelessly.

"Does it matter?" She asked crossing her arms and raising a less than perfect manicured reddish tinged brow. Harley knew without a doubt that Hopper probably wouldn't go into details about it, but she wanted to make it known she had an idea about the shenanigans that went down in Hawkins. She refused to give up Nancy as her source for the clipping.

"I know you've been busy, Chief. This right here-" She pointed at the clipping with a black painted fingernail, "This is the kind of stuff you see in bad television. I mean, really, out of all the places in the world it happened in Hawkins?" Harley whispered as she shoved the clipping back into her pocket.

Hopper looked uncomfortable talking about the whole situation.

"Trust me, Harley, the feeling is mutual." Hopper remarked with a sigh.

"Is Will okay?" Harley asked quietly as Hopper nodded to her question.

"Yeah, I mean, as good as he can be. Life goes on in Hawkins, Harley. I'm just glad its over." Hopper lamented at the end with a very tight smile that didn't reach his eyes. He quickly got up out of his desk chair, grabbing his hat and placing it on his head. He dismissed the conversation quickly, to which Harley raised a confused brow.

"Come on, kid. Let's grab some breakfast at the diner and we can catch up. I'll drive you back to your place so I can say hi to your mom." He grabbed his coat and started pulling it on as Harley snatched up her skateboard, following him out as he told Florence where he'd be for the afternoon.

"It's past breakfast time though." Harley pointed out.

"Nothin' wrong with having two breakfasts, kid." Hopper responded with a gruff voice, but she knew without looking at him that he was smirking. She gave a small wave to Florence as she gazed at Harley

with a little more of a lively smile this time around since knowing who she was now. Harley ducked out as Hopper held open the door for her. She walked out to Hopper's Blazer and smiled fondly.

She whistled at the beast of a Blazer and carefully placed her skateboard in the backseat before hopping in the passenger side. "The last time I was here you were just getting this truck." Harley remarked as she cracked open the window to allow the crisp breeze to flow through her locks as they drove.

He looked at her with surprise. "It's really been four years since you and your mom were here, huh?" He shook his head and Harley had to admit that time just seemed to fly by these days.

The last time she had been here for an extended amount of time was when she was thirteen. She had been dubbed babysitter for a bunch of rambunctious boys that taught her Dungeons and Dragons. She even remembered poking fun at Steve Harrington about his preppy hair. Nancy and Harley were inseparable that Summer. She could still smell Nancy's vanilla perfume. She'd tease Nancy about it endlessly because it was so strong.

Harley would make gagging faces as Nancy swatted her shoulder.

Her mother and Hopper, on the other hand, had a very big falling out. She had gotten into a wreck while under the influence with pills. Hopper pulled strings to get her mom off with a slap on the wrist since it was a small city, but it had ruined their time in Hawkins. Hopper and her mother had a screaming match and the next thing she knew they were moving to Oregon.

When she got in, she looked around and frowned at the mess that was the passenger seat floor. "Is that an Eggo box?" Harley picked up the box, but Hopper quickly plucked them from her curious hands and shoved it in a trashbag in the back seat that looked to be overflowing with all kinds of junk.

"What? A man can't eat Eggo's every once in awhile?" Harley gave him a bemused glance as Hopper huffed. He started up the Blazer and pulled out of the parking lot of the Hawkins police station. Hopper and Harley fell into casual conversation as they headed down the

street until he glanced at her and saw she didn't have her seat belt on.

"Put your seat belt on." He gruffed out as his right hand tightened around the steering wheel. Harley looked at him and the empty roads with an angsty blow of her breath. The roads were empty since everyone was either at work or school. She hadn't enrolled yet, but her mother was supposed to go with her later this afternoon to get registered.

"There's no one on the road, Hopper. We're more likely to be crushed by a meteor." Harley added with an immature rise to her voice. She honestly hated wearing seat belts because they cut into her paper-thin skin on her neck. She felt constricted by them.

"Stranger things have happened. Now put it on." Hopper remarked, his eyes trained to the road ahead, but his demeanor had shifted as he said it. There was an edge to him that iced over at the mere comment and she couldn't put her finger on what exactly it was. She quietly put her seat belt on and crossed her arms with another huff coming from her pouty pink lips.

He smirked lightly at her teenage ways before grumbling out, "You know..it's gonna be really nice having you back around Hawkins."

Harley popped her gum, "Don't be so sure. I'm a little older and a tad bit more rebellious."

She gleamed her pearly whites at him and he rumbled out a laugh while responding snarkily, "That's what lock up is for."

"You wouldn't dare!" Harley cried out playfully at the audacity that her uncle would throw her in the pen.

Hopper nodded, "Try me, kid." They smirked at one another until the conversation drifted to how different California was than Indiana. As they drove on to the diner, Harley released a breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding, and along with it she released the growing tightness in her chest she had felt at leaving California... and at leaving Billy.

Being back in Hawkins was going to be a good thing. She had to believe that.

If she willed herself hard enough, maybe, just maybe she'd forget Billy Hargrove altogether and move on with her life. Too bad she had no idea that getting over Billy Hargrove would prove to be very hard when in a month's time he would be moving to Hawkins, Indiana, bringing along his bad boy looks and the reputation that followed.

Author's Note:

Uncle Hopper and Harley are the cutest and I'm here for it! So, to be clear Harley has been in contact with Nancy for a long time. Sometimes they'd go months without talking, but they'd pick back up right where they left off when contacting each other via letters and phone calls. Last time Harley was in Hawkins was about fourish years ago.. she was thirteen and the Hawkins gang we know and love are the boys she babysat.

Harley and Dustin's friendship is going to be absurdly adorable so a little heads up ;)

I hope you all enjoyed a little more backstory and history about Hopper and his sister. And crossing fingers I'm doing Hopper justice. I'm trying to stay in character as best as possible since I'm including new characters in this story! Let me know how you enjoyed it. I'm really invested with this story!

4. Catching Up

Author's Note: I got carried away and wrote a more in depth chapter and didn't get to the boys and the arcade scene I have planned. However, it'll be in the next chapter and I promise after that chapter we will time skip to October and to our fav bad boy BILLY ;)

Catching Up

Harley knew it was only a matter of time before the civil demeanor between her Uncle and her mother would fizzle out. Then out the ugly words would rear, and the resentment they held for each other. She knew through the resentment there was an obligation of love they had for one another. Hopper wanted her mother clean and her mother believed that as her older brother he was supposed to be at her beck and call.

Clearly, she had yet to learn the true definition of being an adult. Or a parent.

Their voices were quickly drowned out over the devilish lyrics of Ozzy Osbourne through her blue Walkman, clad with a couple band stickers on the back. She fidgeted with the fuzzy orange earphones before fixing them in place on her head. Her lean body was currently sprawled out on the mattress that lay in what would soon be her bedroom. If she ever got around to unpacking this weekend. Her bedroom was in the front near the main windows, which would prove easy for sneaking out.

Her mother either wasn't thinking when she offered Harley that bedroom, or she knew that Harley would find a way to sneak out no matter what, so might as well give her the best vantage point so she wouldn't disturb her slumber when she was high off pills. Curiosity got the better of her and she lowered the volume on her Walkman, laying still upon the mattress as her foot stopped tapping in time to the beat.

"I'm more of a father figure to that girl than anyone has ever been. What does that tell you? You're messy, Lydia. Clean your shit up."

Hopper's disgruntled voice could be heard between the thin walls of the house. Harley frowned.

"Just get the hell out, Hopper."

The slam of the front door reverberated throughout the tiny shack of a two-bedroom house. Harley winced at the abrupt sound, lifting herself off her mattress to sneak a look out her window at Hopper as he hopped into the Blazer. Almost as if on instinct his eyes locked upon Harley's as she looked out the window at him. She threw up the peace sign to him, his expression softening as it always did for. He nodded ever so slightly before putting his vehicle into reverse, away from her destructive mother.

Harley felt a burn of embarrassment.

Everywhere she went her mother caused some kind of trouble. They had never been in a place where her mother wasn't a complete mess. The emotional storm within Harley intensified. Maybe it was a deep rage or a deep smear of embarrassment at the fact that her mother pulled her down with her each time but whatever it was had Harley heated. Her bedroom door flung open and Harley whipped around with hostile emerald green eyes as her mother's bright hazel eyes rolled at the sight of Harley's hardened gaze.

"You could knock." Harley remarked hotly as her mother crossed her arms in the doorway, leaning against the splintering edges. Harley made a mental note to see about a new paint job for her bedroom because the white baseboards against the eggshell wallpaper was going to make her vomit from boredom.

"You could lose the attitude." Her mother clipped.

"What did you say this time?" Harley asked with a long sigh, pinching the bridge of her nose and moving her hand to her temples as the threat of a headache was imminent. Her mother's mere presence stressed her out, and half the time she couldn't stand being around her. The tension between them was entirely too thick to be tolerable.

"You know how Hopper is. He came in being hostile like always." Her mother remarked with a pout. The victim game poured off her every

word and tone. She poked out her bottom lip as if she had done nothing wrong. Harley didn't even bother arguing with her mother because she knew damn well Hopper stormed out because of her mother's denial.

Harley gave her mother a once over.

She was clad in a tight black pencil skirt that screamed give me attention, a chiffon V-neck turquoise blouse that ruffled down her overly exposed bosom. Her red hair was clipped up into a beehive like bun and her lips were as bright red as her Mustang. Harley narrowed her eyes at her mother's vixen-like outfit.

"Hot date or just a stroll through town?"

Harley's mother sighed and pushed a stray strand of fiery red hair away from her face, using her left hand to pat her beehive full of hairspray while her right hand pointed at Harley with a lack of authority. "Your smart mouth is going to get you grounded. I look fine. We're going to your school now to register, so get ready."

Her mother stared at Harley's unmoving form before sighing overdramatically.

"Today, Harley!"

Harley moved slowly off the mattress that was carelessly placed by the movers on the dull colored hard wood floor. She pushed herself up and pulled off her earphones completely, tossing the little music box on the mattress to leave behind for later. She trudged out of her bedroom and right past her mother without meeting her gaze. She nearly gagged on the intense perfume that entered her nose and she made a face as she passed.

The rage that intensified of Harley was like a simmering pan on a stove stop just waiting to boil over. Watching Hopper storm out moments ago still fresh on her mind. They hadn't been here for more than twenty-four hours and Hopper was already annoyed beyond reason at her mother.

That made two people.

"That perfume won't cover up the fact that everyone in Hawkins remembers who you are and what you did." Harley pointed out sarcastically while walking past the tiny living room space and towards the front door.

"That was a long time ago, and everyone deserves a second chance." Her mother commented in a high and mighty tone, but her eyes averted their gaze from Harley as she spoke. Harley rolled her eyes at her mother. Hawkins had whispered endlessly about Hopper's boozy sister. They were only halfway correct. She was his sister, but she wasn't boozy. Just high off prescriptions.

"Mom, you've had multiple second chances! That's the problem. We move every single time you screw up or get into a rut. Second chances are for those that have screwed up once. This is a pattern." Harley vented as she threw her hands in the air out of frustration

Her mother frowned deeply, the wrinkle lines showing in a very unflattering way. Harley wanted to respect and love her mother to the full extent that a child should. She tried so very hard to keep her cool around her mother, but it never went as planned. And God knew she wanted to respect her mother and treat her with unconditional love, but she made it so damn hard.

She made it hard to respect her when she wasn't the most prized mother figure. She was heavily flawed, and her problems spilled out into Harley's life. Now at seventeen years of age, Harley was still reaping the sour seeds that her mother had sown during her irresponsible life. Harley was finding it harder to put up with these days.

"You're just pissy because of that boy." Her mother grinded out as the only retort she could think of. It was typical for her mother to default to something else when the topic was about her problem. Harley's hand had been on the door handle of the aged front door and she paused, icily turning around to her mother, eyes slit into hardened green irises.

She wouldn't even placate her mother with a response. Her mother hated Billy from day one, and she had never even had a full conversation with him. She was either too high or looked him up and

down with a sour note to her face. As if her opinions of who Harley hung out with mattered when her mother's company was usually less than stellar.

Her mother followed closely behind her and out to the gravel driveway. She gazed at her for a moment and shook her head as she spoke, "I don't suppose you're going to look for job while we're out and about today."

Lydia Hopper smiled sweetly and nodded. "I'm already on it, honey. I promise this time will be different. You won't have to work if you don't want to. I can-I can manage everything." Her mother's mood swings were like whiplash and Harley sighed heavily while shrugging.

"We'll see how long that lasts." Harley muttered as her eyes sought out her '71 Mach 1 Mustang. The last thing she wanted to do was ride with her mother if she was going to go job hunting after registration. She could barely stand being in the same room with her for more than thirty minutes much less spend all day with her in the station wagon.

"I'll follow you." Harley commented firmly, as if to allow her mother no wiggle room to argue. She ran back into the house to get her keys, license, and some cash from her bedroom. Once back outside her mother frowned and cocked her head to the side as if trying to figure out why she didn't want to ride with her.

"Harley, come on. Don't be like that. After we're done you need to come home to unpack."

"I'll unpack later." Harley muttered as her mother rolled her eyes with a click of her tongue, getting into her station wagon and starting it up.

Simultaneously, Harley fired up *The Red Devil* and smiled as she purred with an aggressive growl. Harley would take the raucous tunes of Def Leppard that flowed through her stereo over the silence that would have followed if she had ridden with her mother in the station wagon.

Hawkins High was just as she had remembered it; close community feel with the cliché cliques of people that usually involved the jocks, the geeks, the normies, and the skaters. Mix in a few other micor groups of people and that was basically Hawkins High with a little bit of a homely feel. It was different than school in California, where everyone dressed to perfection and the main goal was to become the most popular person.

Hawkins could be clique-y, but it wasn't as superficial as California, much to Harley's relief. She was glad to be back in an environment that bordered on normal compared to where she had been. The thing about Hawkins was that you either had two futures to embrace; you stayed in Hawkins for the rest of your life or you left the moment you got that college scholarship and never look back.

The kids that wanted out were very easy to pick out as they buried their heads in studies or sports, desperate for a scholarship to get them out of town. The kids that didn't mind Hawkins, or a life outside of Hawkins, could be found hanging out without a care in the world as to what their future had in store for them. Some of those kids were even being groomed to take over family businesses in Hawkins.

Harley's future was like looking into a clouded crystal ball that refused to clear up. She had no idea what would happen once she finally graduated, but she chose to live her life one day at a time rather than plan for something that looked bleak enough as it were.

Registration at Hawkins High had gone smoothly enough, and the staff looked surprised to see Harley and her mother back in Hawkins. Mrs. Dimley, the registrar for the high school, was enthused to see Harley but her eyes flattened as she took in her mother's return to Hawkins. Everyone remembered Lydia Hopper.

Mrs. Dimley had short curly brown hair and an oval face with black rimmed spectacles. Her eyes were the kindest of blues, but they had an edge to them that meant she could turn sweet old lady to stern lecturer in matter of seconds. She was primly dressed in a floral colored dress with knee high hose and black belted shoes.

Harley thought she smelled faintly of lavender, which wasn't

surprising since that oil was used to soothe and relax. It was probably necessary in a high school environment.

She handed Harley a packet of her information before smiling kindly at her,

"I hope we do see you through until graduation next May, Harley. It'll be a treat having you back at Hawkins for your final year. You'll start next Monday since it will be the beginning of a new week. I really encourage you to take a look around today or tomorrow to get a feel for your classes, your locker, and of course introduce yourself to as many teachers as possible,"

She paused as if further driving the point,

"It'll be a good idea to do that so you can gather up the curriculum's and books needed for each class this weekend."

After gathering her paperwork in a bland manilla folder, they left the office. Harley heard the telltale sign of a school bell ringing. The students poured out of their classrooms and she wanted nothing more than to run and hide as her mother stood next to her in the hallway. Kids looked at her twice as they passed, landing on her and then her mother before shuffling along.

Harley caught sight of a snogging pair of students against the rusty lockers, locked lips pulling away to whisper something and then they went back to kissing. She smirked at the familiar dainty ballerina-like figure of Nancy Wheeler. Her black pants were perfectly ironed and her white striped shirt made her mousy brown hair pop. Her hair was down in messy waves and her shoes were comfy sneakers.

"I'll unpack when I get back home later tonight." Harley offered to her mother in a more civil tone than she had held earlier in the day. Her mother hesitated, looking at Harley with twitching red lips. She wanted to tell her no, but she couldn't when she barely had control over her teenage daughter as it were. Her mother fiddled with the strap of her black purse before nodding and hurrying out of the school, weaving her way between students in a flurry of red hair and strong perfume.

Harley waltzed over towards Nancy, and none other than Steve Harrington. Her eyes widened lightly at how the two had grown, reminding her just how long she had been gone from Hawkins. She snickered at the sight of Steve's high maintenance hair, his beat-up sneakers and his salmon colored polo.

"I'm not sure if I want to gag or make cute girly noises right now at the fact that you two are snogging in the middle of the hall like a bunch of saps."

Nancy's eyes fluttered open as they had been closed during their embrace. Steve jerked away and looked at Harley's fiery red hair, his plump lips falling agape as the sight of Harley Hopper. Nancy's eyes grew increasingly wide as her doe-like face shifted from shock to elation.

"Harley?"

She nodded to Nancy with her signature smirk, flicking back long strands of red hair away from her face as Nancy blinked away the residual shock.

"The one and only, Nan!" Harley exclaimed, tucking the school packet in her right hand as Nancy launched herself at Harley, their bodies colliding in a flood of emotions as Nancy gripped her tightly.

"I have missed you so much!" Nancy whispered into her shoulder as Harley shoved down the lump forming in her throat. Steve stood by with a dubious look to his face as he looked between the girls as they hugged tightly.

"Harley Hopper? Wait, the last time you were here didn't your mom-" He didn't finish as Harley pulled out of her embrace with Nancy, finishing Steve's question for him.

"Cause a scene after wrecking while under the influence of prescriptions? Yep. That would be my lovely mother. We were all about thirteen at the time." Nancy gave Steve a look as if he shouldn't have said anything but he shrugged lightly as if he didn't mean it to come out that way.

"I can't believe it's been that long. So are you here to stay? And is that a nose ring?" Nancy asked, trying to change the subject for Harley's sake. Steve shoved his hands in his jean pockets, while Nancy looked hopefully at Harley.

"I just enrolled. You're lookin at the newest student of Hawkins High." She quipped while holding up her manilla folder of student information.

"Hopper asked if I had metal in my nose, but I like it. It adds character. " Harley snickered lightly as Nancy's smile danced wider across her face. Steve raised his brows and bit back a snarky comment for Nancy's sake.

"Oh, after school tomorrow I could show you around to your classes and we could catch up. Friday night's my mom orders pizza. You should join us." Nancy piped up with an excited look to her eyes.

Harley nodded in appreciation. "Yeah, let's do it. Sorry Harrington, she's all mine tomorrow after school." Harley flashed him a row of pearly whites as Nancy smirked. He rolled his eyes but when he looked at his Nancy his eyes softened considerably. It was then Harley saw just how much in that subtle gaze how much Steve really liked Nancy. She had heard about Steve in letters, but Harley planned on getting the details tomorrow night.

"I'll figure something out." He offered.

Harley nodded, "I mean you could always spend the evening grooming that hair of yours or something. Seems pretty high maintenance these days."

"And you seem just as annoying as you were back when we were kids." Steve pointed out with a right swift hand fluffing up his thick locks. She stuck her black painted middle finger up at Steve and he laughed lightly as Nancy smiled between the two. Everything felt normal again, like it was going to be okay. It felt right.

Her green eyes softened at Nancy, and she looked to them both quickly before adding lowly, "I'm sorry I wasn't here for-well for all that happened. I'm sorry about Barbara."

Nancy's eyes stilled and became ever so glassy. She didn't know if she was reliving the trauma of losing a friend or maybe the mere mention brought up bad memories. She internally chastised herself for bringing it up.

"Thank you. And it's okay, Harley. You're here now." She offered a sad smile that didn't reach her eyes as Steve went uncharacteristically quiet. She bit her lower lip and fiddled with her nose ring as Nancy eyed it silently. "I'm glad you're back." Nancy whispered with a more bubbly smile now appearing upon her face as Harley nodded in agreement.

"The boys will be happy to have you back." Nancy added, pulling her brown messenger bag farther up her shoulder.

"Speaking of...where will they be at after school?" Harley asked curiously as both Steve and Nancy looked at one another and then back at Harley.

They answered in unison, "The arcade!"

"They've been there all Summer." Steve mentioned as Nancy nodded in agreement.

Harley smirked and pulled her car keys from her pocket. "Looks like I know where my next stop will be later. I'll catch up with you tomorrow after school. Let's meet at the library first and we can go over my schedule." Nancy nodded but not before hugging Harley again while Steve merely smiled politely at Harley.

"We should get going. Steve needs help studying for a chemistry quiz during study hour." Nancy looked up at Steve as he rolled his eyes playfully.

"Riiight. Is that what you guys call it these days? Studying?" Harley snipped while doing air quotes when she said *studying*. Steve smirked and Nancy turned a thousand shades of red as she tugged lightly on Steve's shirt collar to follow her.

"We have a lot of catching up to do, Nancy Wheeler!" Harley remarked as Nancy and Steve walked down the hallway with her.

They parted ways with a cordial goodbye, but Harley could see the genuine happiness in Nancy's doe-like eyes as she waved to her.

Harley made a plan to hit up the snowcone shack, the record store and a couple other spots for school essentials before she would head to the arcade. She'd be lying if she said she wasn't excited to see her favorite nerd herd group of boys. As she turned the key in the ignition, *Quiet Riot* blasted from the local radio and she frowned while pulling out of the parking lot.

Memories of a bonfire on the beach in California with this band playing from someone's truck flooded her mind. Billy's husky eyes taking her in as she shimmied around the fire with a beer and zero cares in the world who watched her. She didn't know it yet, but that night Billy Hargrove vowed to make her his and only his before Summer was over. But he was too late...because two days later she announced she was moving from Long Beach to Indiana, leaving Billy with a wounded heart and a bitter taste in his mouth.

Author's Note:

Harley is officially back in Hawkins High and will start Monday! If anyone is confused the day is Thursday! I really am loving this story so, so much and please don't worry..Billy will come in after the next chapter. The next chapter will be Harley reuniting with the boys at the arcade and after that we'll skip ahead in time to the first week of October! Hope everyone is enjoying the story so far. I like to build momentum with my stories so I take my time with these chapter's for you all. ;)

And of course her and her mother's relationship is really strained and there is so much tension. I feel bad for Harley, but sooner than later a certain bad boy will come back and distract her from her mother's problematic behavior.

And we will be getting some flashback chapters SOON! :D

5. Nerd Herd

Nerd Herd

When Harley finally reached the arcade school was out and the place was packed full of little rug rats of all ages. She squinted from the driver seat of her Mustang before turning off the engine, the music blasting through her stereo ceased instantly. She hopped out, making sure to slip her leather jacket on over her narrow shoulders before shoving her keys in the pockets of her pants. She was still wearing the same thing she had since the morning, but she found it hard pressed to go back home after seeing Nancy and Steve.

Harley was just delaying the inevitable of unpacking. Procrastination ran in her bloodline, but Harley tried her best not to be as bad as her mother was at putting things off. She knew she'd feel better once her room looked more like an angsty teenage girl's bedroom instead of a bland empty space with a mattress, but first she wanted to see her favorite group of kids.

Hopefully they were even here.

She popped a piece of bubblegum into her mouth, disposing of the aluminum wrapper in the trash bin near the front of the entrance. The front was lined with a few skateboards and a rack of bicycles that lined the brick wall of the building. From the outside, the building was a blend of yellow white, the neon sign not yet lit up since the sun had yet to go down. It was big and purple, displaying the name *Arcade Palace* in a show of glitz and attention. The brighter and extravagant it was the more attention it would draw to people that passed by the place.

There were picnic tables off to the left and a few teenagers sat around chain smoking and puffing out the cancer fumes in a flurry of smoke. A girl laughed loudly; her wavy jet-black hair cropped to the tip tops of her shoulders contrasted sharply with her olive complexion. Her black V-neck shirt was dipped low to her bosoms and her arms were intricately painted with tattoos. The other kids around her looked similar in black, their own skin tattooed to oblivion.

The group of teenagers gave her a glance, raising curious brows.

Harley's red hair always attracted attention.

Despite their angsty exterior and their black clothes, the group instantly brought back memories of California to her mind, but only because of what lay beside the girl. The pack of cigarettes on the picnic table next to her leg were the same brand that a certain bad boy always bought. The girl gave her curious glance, her lip gloss covered lips curling up into a smirk before Harley realized she was staring for too long.

"Want a cigarette, Crimson?" The voice of the boy next to her called out with a purr.

He had long, straight black hair that was equally as black as the girl's hair sitting next to him. They looked like they could be related, except he had an assortment of eyebrow rings and she didn't. Harley chewed on the offer for a moment before looking at the arcade, and then glancing back at the boy.

"I ain't gonna' bite. Much." He cackled out with a snicker as the girl next to him nudged him with her knee and clicked her tongue against the roof her mouth. She hopped off the picnic table and strolled to Harley at a leisurely pace.

"Name's Lacey. Ignore my dweeb of a brother, Leon."

She held out her hand and Harley shook it casually, noticing the chipped black nail polish fading on her fingernails. Upon closer inspection, the girl had crystal clear skin, but her teeth were slightly stained which suggested coffee and nicotine habits. Lacey pulled a cigarette from the packet and handed it to her.

Harley put the cigarette above her right ear and smirked at the new girl, "Thanks."

"You're new around these parts." She mentioned, giving Harley's form a once over while taking in her vivacious red hair and leather jacket. Her brother Leon hopped up off the picnic table, his tight black pants and baggy band shirt giving him a very edgy appearance, especially

since both of their skin tones were olive. As he approached, he jingled as if he had a pair of keys in his back pocket. When he appeared closer, she noticed the acne scars that lined his face and the nervous edge to his aura.

Where Lacey seemed cool and calm, her brother made up for in nervous energy.

"New-ish. I used to live here a time ago, but I'm back. Name's Harley Hopper."

The two siblings glanced at each other with a knowing smirk as the last name triggered warning bells. Leon's face soured, but Lacey looked rather curious at Harley's last name. Everyone knew Chief Hopper, and if Harley had to guess, these kids probably had a run in with him before.

"Oh, this could be fun." The girl mused aloud while wiggling her sleek black brows up and down. Harley felt her cheeks burn a mild shade of red as the two kids definitely knew who she was related to. She didn't know if they remembered her, but they made the connection upon hearing Hopper.

A loud black Chevy truck pulled up and backfired, black smoke billowing from the tailpipe. They looked past Harley at the vehicle and then back at her. Leon nodded towards the vehicle, "That's our ride. See ya' around, Crimson!" He gazed at her a bit too long before he started walking towards the black truck. She saw the keys in his back pocket and connected it with the jingle she had heard moments ago.

His sister hung behind for a minute.

"See you around school, then?" Lacey asked casually, as if she could take it or leave it.

Harley nodded politely, "Sure. I guess you I owe after this." Harley pointed to the cigarette above her ear and the girl grinned like the Cheshire cat.

"Consider it a welcome home gift, Harley Hopper." She shrugged with

a perky demeanor before sauntering off towards the truck with her brother.

Lacey hopped in the passenger seat and the driver took off aggressively, the motor roaring as it took off down the street. The smell of it made Harley's nose twitch at the smell that attacked her senses. When the truck disappeared, she decided to hurry inside to see if the boys were around.

Walking into the arcade was like walking back in time to a decade when she was a kid. She smirked at the assortment of games, their lights glowing brightly just to grab attention. Other games made funny noises as you passed by. The glitz and glamour of the sign outside was just as strong inside the arcade. She walked around casually, inspecting each game and sometimes peeking around the shoulder of someone that was playing.

Harley was never a huge arcade gamer until California. The arcade along the boardwalk at Long Beach had grabbed her attention one day and for a good solid week she lived there, playing relentlessly until her fingers grew achy and her vision blurred. The arcade had been a nice escape and something she could focus on that had nothing to do with her mother's baggage and prescription problems.

Her green eyes continued to seek out a particular group of kids.

She didn't even know if she would recognize them.

Hell, would they even recognize me?

As she walked around a corner, there was a familiar hoot and holler that trailed over to her. She turned to the left and leaned against an unused pinball machine as her eyes assessed the group of pubescent boys that jumped up and down. One boy in particular had a mop of thick, curly hair that flowed from all sides of the red, white and blue trucker cap he wore. He was surrounded by three other boys who moved around animatedly while cheering on the curly haired boy who was laser focused on the game he was playing.

Harley glanced up at the game; *Dragon's Lair*.

She smirked as the boys lost their mind when the game ended, each of them putting their hands upon their heads and shaking it. The curly haired boy hit the top part of the game and an outraged moan of defeat could be heard from him.

These were her boys. Older, yes, but it was them.

Her heart skipped at the beat of nostalgia that swept through her bones. Harley sauntered up behind the group of boys quietly, her lips turning up into her signature smirk as she casually stood behind them with her arms crossed against her chest.

"You should probably let a Dragon's Lair pro play next time. This game isn't for the weak."

Like clockwork, their heads snapped up at the sound of her voice, each one raising their brows and looking her up and down.

"And I suppose you're a pro?" Mike snapped back, crossing his arms as he gazed at Harley with absolutely zero recognition in his eyes.

What did she expect though?

It was four years ago that she was last here, and the boys were so much younger back then. They had changed a little bit, but the one thing that remained the same was that they were inseparable, and if she was correct, she remembered Mike saying they had been together since fourth grade.

Dustin took a small step forward, his pouty lips hung agape as recognition swirled in his eyes. He started forming a wide open-mouth grin that made his skin crinkle underneath his eyes. He was all gums up top with the exception of those two little pearls that glistened, while the bottom row was full of white chompers. He swelled with excitement while Lucas gave Harley a sassy look.

No one noticed Dustin about to boil over with excitement until he yelled out her name.

"Harley!"

"Wait, what? Harley?" Mike asked out loud, looking from Dustin to

Harley.

"Harley?" Will whispered in disbelief as his petite form moved an inch forward.

"No way! Harley? As in our old babysitter?" Lucas crowed out as he glanced at his friends for confirmation to this absurd idea that Harley Hopper was back. She smirked in confirmation, while Mike shook his head as if he were seeing a ghost.

"How's my favorite nerd herd?" She asked cheekily, blowing a bubble and popping it loudly as the boys gathered around her like a herd of deer rushing out to a feeder.

"We're your *only* nerd herd." Lucas pointed out with an obvious tone to his voice.

Dustin was the first to latch on to her, hugging her tightly and refusing to let go as the others crowded around her, trying to get their chance to slide in. Dustin squeezed her tightly as she picked the hat up on his head and turned it over in her hands to inspect it. Using her right hand, she ruffled the mop of curls on his head before placing the hat back on his head.

"I see you still got that same mop of hair, Dustin." Harley remarked with a smirk.

Dustin was in heaven as he laughed.

"Please, please, please tell me you're back for good." Dustin begged as he finally let go, the familiarity of his lisp making her smile.

The boys gathered around her and she found it difficult to talk, let alone explain herself, as the boys all asked questions in unison, one on top of the other. It proved to be difficult to focus on any specific kiddo.

"It's been years!"

"Why are you back?"

"Can we play D&D like old times this weekend?"

She put her hand out to ease them up after the onslaught of questions.

"Easy there. There's enough of me to go around." She sarcastically stated as Mike rolled his eyes at her.

Will pursed his lips into a smirk, looking at Mike for confirmation that this was in fact real. There was an palpable buzz in the air as the group reunited. She wasn't a mushy gushy kind of girl but seeing them grown up and still together as friends made her push down a lump in her throat.

"Stand back and let me get a good look at you." She exclaimed as each boy finished hugging her and they took a step back so she could inspect them all. Each kid had grown significantly in the past four years. Her heart thumped with a genuine excitement at being back around the kiddos who taught her so much about D&D, and other nerdy games.

They were truly a remarkable group of boys, mostly good with the exception of streaks of rebellion, but they were otherwise great kids. She never turned down a chance to babysit them back in the day. Nancy would get annoyed and claim she liked to spend more time with her brother than her, but Harley always made it up to her sometime or another with a sleepover and pizza.

"You have a nose ring now?" Mike asked with a raised brow while Dustin just stood there with a big goofy grin on his face.

"Yeah, it's pretty cool." She responded, briefly touching it with her right pointer finger. Mike, Will and Lucas stood there exchanging looks. Dustin continued to look elated, but now he started rocking on the balls of his shoes back and forth.

"So, tell us already! Are you here to stay?" Dustin asked, clearly wanting to get to the most important part of the conversation. She smirked and looked at the boys while letting an excited laugh slip out at their hopeful looks.

"I'm going to make sure I stay until graduation. I don't have plans of moving again. Yet."

They all jumped up and punched the air, Will's eyes widened as he stared at Harley in excitement. He was more solemn than she remembered but considering what had happened she didn't blame the kid. She gave the boys a once over, each of her eyes roaming their innocent and spry faces as they eagerly chomped at the bits awaiting what she had to say next.

"Where have you been? We really missed you." Dustin lamented with a small pout.

Lucas knocked his right arm into Dustin's left side and scoffed, "You missed her because you're in love with her." Dustin looked outraged and started stuttering while Mike and Will shook their heads as Lucas and Dustin started bickering. Lucas made a face and kissy sounds as Dustin nudged Lucas hard in the shoulder.

"Whatever, man!" Dustin huffed.

Harley didn't want to make Dustin anymore embarrassed than he already seemed, so she glossed over the statement and shrugged, "I was in California before this, but before that it was Oregon. We've been all over, really."

"Wait, you were in California? Did you see the ocean?" Will's lithe voice finally spoke up among the other voices and everyone looked at Will, before returning to gaze at Harley to see what she had to say.

"I got to see the ocean every single day. We were living in Long Beach," Will widened his eyes at Harley and she smiled before continuing, "And the best part was that you could hear the actual ocean inside the seashells."

The boys, minus Mike, looked excited to hear more.

He shook his head and rolled his eyes. "That's not true. It's just the noise of where you're at rushing to your ears or some crap."

Harley crossed her arms and gave Mike a perplexed look. He was the same Mike as she remembered, older sure, but something was off about him. There was a sour note to his tone, and she caught it immediately. She very well knew it was a myth, but as a kid she

believed it was the ocean and she still liked to believe it was the ocean.

Where was the harm in that?

"Wow, who shit in your cereal, Mike?" She quipped, not afraid to snip back at the nerd herd she considered to be like her little brothers. Mike ran a hand through his own messy waves and looked away, but Dustin interjected before the moment got awkward.

"He's just upset because he's had girl trouble."

Lucas and Will looked pointedly at Dustin, as if he had revealed a secret that was not supposed to be spoken about. Will looked spooked, while Mike clicked his tongue against his mouth in irritation, calling out Dustin's name in an annoyed tone.

"Dustin, what the hell?"

Lucas looked at Harley and laughed nervously, his pearly white teeth flashing in her direction before speaking quickly, stumbling over his own words for a moment, "What Dustin means is that Mike had a friend, a girl that was his friend I mean, and she moved far away,"

Will chimed in while nodding his head up and down in confirmation, "She left Hawkins."

Harley gazed at them with the weariness of an adult who felt they were privy to an inside joke, "O-o-kay, well where she move to?"

"Far away." Mike ended the conversation abruptly and those simple words and Harley saw the hidden pain in his eyes briefly before he averted his gaze.

"You know, I left someone behind in California. He was..."

"Your boyfriend?" Mike asked with a raised nose, as if the thought of her having a boyfriend was somewhat disgusting. Lucas seemed to share the sentiment, while Dustin looked crushed to hear she might have had a boyfriend. Will just smiled kindly. He was such sweet boy. Harley couldn't imagine the horrors he suffered while being kidnapped, or what had happened while he was away. She sure as

shit didn't want to bring it up either.

"No, I don't think so..but he was a friend. I left him behind moving to Hawkins. I understand how you're feeling, Mike." She tried to offer some sort of empathy towards Mike's situation because the sour tone he had taken earlier was not the Mike Wheeler she remembered.

"But, I mean, now you have us. So, that's good, right?" Dustin asked with a hopeful grin while looking at Harley. She couldn't help but smile at Dustin and his optimistic eyes as they sparkled upon seeing her return to Hawkins.

"Yeah, it's really good." She gave Dustin a sweet smile all for him and he beamed at her with his dimpled smile and chunky cheeks.

"So, are we going to D&D this weekend like old times?" Will asked with a curious note to his tone as he looked at everyone and then back at Harley.

"She probably doesn't remember how to play." Mike responded while Harley made a face as if she were offended. She put her hand to her chest and shook her head,

"Mike, I'm hurt you'd think I would ever forget."

"Yeah, Mike! Remember when she sacrificed herself to the Malar in that one campaign? And she did it for the good of the team! I highly doubt she forgot how to play." Dustin talking up her D&D skills to Mike made her smile, her lips pulling back as Lucas nodded in agreement.

It was genuinely heart-warming to hear how much Dustin and the boys remembered of her. Will nodded enthusiastically with Lucas and Dustin. She found it hard not to laugh as they talked amongst themselves for a moment, as if debating while she was in earshot about the pros and cons of allowing Harley, who was also a girl, into their D&D campaign again.

"Come on, Mike, quit being a sour puss." Dustin whispered.

"Yeah, I mean, we haven't seen her in years. I think she should be able to come." Will whispered fervently as Mike chewed on his gums

in serious thought.

"Dude, she's a nerd just like us, no matter what she says." Lucas added as Harley snickered in the background.

"I heard that!" She called out.

Dustin peeked his head out from the group huddle they had formed while whispering. "You're a nerd, Harley. Deal with it." Dustin grinned before poking his head back into the huddle, disappearing from her view as their hushed whispers gained momentum.

"We played for countless hours that Summer, and if I remember correctly you were always begging me to come play." She teased, but mostly to Mike, leaning in and ruffling his hair as he swiped at her hand with an embarrassed look upon his face. However, not a moment later he couldn't help but smirk at Harley. The boys broke the huddle as Mike took a step forward, always the ringleader of the troop.

"Okay, okay. You can come campaign with us. But, under one condition."

Harley nodded, crossing her arms and popping a huge bubble, pulling it back in her mouth and chewing as she raised a groomed brow at Mike Wheeler, awaiting his request.

"You bring the snacks."

Dustin looked so excited as he nodded up and down.

"Alright, I'll bring the snacks. How about Saturday night?"

"That works. Jonathan can drop me off." Will mentioned as the others nodded that they could make it. Harley beamed as she looked at Lucas and Dustin,

"I can pick you guys up in the Red Devil if your parents are okay with it, of course."

The two boys looked at each other and gave her a hell yeah kind of face.

"Uh, hell yeah!" Lucas called out while everyone started chattering amongst themselves about the weekend plans, including what kind of snacks to bring. She felt overwhelmed as the boys talked over one another with their demands and requests to bring for the weekend fun.

"I don't remember you boys ever eating this much." She stated with a pointed look.

Mike shrugged, "We're growing boys." He grinned up at her with a snarky smile.

Harley gazed at the group, "Don't think I forgot the name's I gave you nerds."

Her eyes rested upon Lucas first. "The Warrior." She stated from memory as she started to recite the names for each of the boys during their campaign nights. Lucas beamed at the title, looking at her incredulously, "You remember that?"

She nodded proudly before her eyes glanced to Mike, "The Prince."

Mike rolled his eyes, but no matter how he felt about it on the outside, he secretly loved being the Prince. She had labeled them all during campaigns to give them more official titles and make it more fun. When they were younger, they would even act the part. Her eyes rested on Will as his petite frame stepped up closer, his little dimples showing as he smiled so broadly in anticipation at what she was about to say.

"The Sorcerer." Will smiled bashfully.

Dustin was practically jumping up and down as each of his friends gave him an eye roll, "What about me?"

Dustin already knew. She could tell by the coy smile that enveloped his face as he bounced giddily on the balls of his sneakers. He remembered darn well what she had called him back in the old days.

"The Knight in shining armour."

Dustin turned to look at his friends, nudging Mike and Lucas, "You

hear that? I'm still the Knight in shining armour."

Will merely rolled his eyes but smiled all the while.

"Yeah, we heard it doofus." Mike answered back quickly.

Lucas snickered, "More like Knight in rusty armour."

Will laughed lightly, but as they started to bicker amongst themselves again so Harley broke it up and nodded towards the arcade,

"All of you babies better stop bickering or else I'm not bringing snacks." They quickly shut up, but they smirked at one another, their gaze returning to Harley as she pointed at the array of games that were all over the arcade.

"Now, let me show you how to kick ass at Dragon's Lair."

The boys gathered around as Harley played, making sure to take turns with the boys as each of them had a chance to try their hand at it while she gave them pointers, and sometimes taunted them for dying during the easier levels. Something inside of Harley softened for these boys. She was never a girl that enjoyed children, but these boys were something special.

They had a bond that Harley never got to have growing up due to moving around so much. They were incredibly lucky they had each other all these years...they were all a constant in each other's lives. Lord knew Harley needed something like that in her life, but unfortunately, she had never been dealt a lucky enough hand.

As Will stepped back to watch Lucas play, she couldn't help but catch his eye. He looked up at her and she smiled at him, unaware of what to really say, but somehow finding the words as they softly slipped from her plump lips,

"I'm glad you're okay, Will."

It wasn't as if his case hadn't made the news. It had been quickly discounted after the original talk, but nationwide news stations had peppered the story into their nightly segments. However, it was there and gone. No follow ups, nor anything else would be heard about the

story. It was as if they reported it because they had to, but quickly swept it under the rug so that the story would be buried sooner than later.

Will ducked his head down for a moment, before gazing back up at her hesitantly. He formed a small smile, nodding his head a couple times. He looked a tad bit more timid these days, but he had always been the quieter one of the boys. She could tell a nod of his head was all he would offer her about what happened, and that was fine with her. She didn't want to dive into it ever, if she were being honest.

Will was safe. Will was home. And everything was going to be alright.

As Dustin turned around to look at her with big, lopsided grin he launched into rapid detail about how she had to come over and see his new comic book collection. He stopped suddenly and looked at her wide eyed before whispering lowly, putting his hand up to shield his mouth while the other guys were busy arguing over the game play of Dragon's Lair.

"Do you still have our super-secret friendship bracelet?"

Harley laughed lightly, lifting the leather jacket sleeve up her right arm and revealing a twine of brightly colored purple and green woven bracelets. Dustin looked from the bracelet to Harley in surprise.

"I don't wear it all the time, but it's always in my jewelry box. Figured I'd wear it today on the off chance I was able to see you."

She smirked as Dustin gulped and looked a bit embarrassed.

"I have mine! I didn't throw it away, it's just that-you know-the guys-" He started to trip on his whispered words, stuttering a bit as he tried his best to explain that he couldn't wear his all the time because the guys would talk shit and never let him hear the end of it.

"Hey, trust me. I get it, Dustin," She started as Dustin looked relieved at her answer.

"As long as you still have it though." She added with a pointed look,

to which he nodded up and down eagerly. They smiled at one another, a secret smile between two friends before returning their gaze to Mike and Lucas as they argued over the correct way to

"You might wanna' get used to this. It happens often." Will murmured as the two boys continued to bicker incessantly.

"Funny enough, I missed this." She looked Will and Dustin as they smirked coyly up at her, while Mike and Lucas continued to hash out their differing opinions.

As the day continued, Harley noticed the weight of her heart ebbed a little bit while hanging out with the boys. But even as she started to momentarily forget about all she left behind in California, she would see a guy with a familiar mullet, and her heart would rapidly increase until she realized it wasn't him.

It didn't matter how much she tried to get Billy Hargrove off her mind, he somehow had a way of creeping back into that space. Like an impossible itch that you couldn't scratch, Billy remained a nuisance, always on the back of her mind and forever engraved upon her distressed heart.

Author's Note:

Lacey and Leon will be two new characters in this story that we will see more of throughout the first half of the book. Hope you enjoyed her interactions with the nerd herd. ;) I absolutely adore her super-secret friendship bracelet with Dustin. XD The next chapter will fast forward to October and the beginning will gloss over kinda what has happened in between today and October. Next chapter we get to see Billy return and I'm DYING from excitement!

6. Creepy Woods and Surprise Encounters

Author's Note: Super long chapter for you all! Sorry for the delay! Life shenanigans and a couple vacations got in the way of updating. But we are BACK! And I made it extra long to make up for not posting on time! ;)

Creepy Woods and Surprise Encounters

Humans are such creatures of habits and Harley was no exception. She settled back into Hawkins like old times. Her time had been divided between catching up on what she had missed since school had already started when she arrived, catching up with Nancy, and putting up with Steve Harrington's surfer jokes. When she wasn't with them, Harley could be found with her favorite nerd herd.

She and the boys had fallen back into a similar pattern of dungeon and dragons, raucous jokes and bad language that Harley felt she was somewhat responsible for since she cursed regularly in front of them. Dustin had become a constant in Harley's after school shenanigans once again. Granted, she didn't see him every day, but there were never more than a few days that spanned that she didn't see the curly haired kiddo.

Hawkins life was a radical change from Long Beach. Where she had been more of a wild child in Long Beach, she had to somewhat tone down the behavior due to Hopper's authority in the po-dunk town. She still smoked, drank and turned her music up too loud in the school parking lot, but there was a mutual respect she had with Hopper, and she didn't want to cause him any more trouble than he already with her mother showing back up.

Hopper seemed like he had enough shit on his plate as it were.

There had been a secretive nature to the way Hopper would dip in and out at their house to visit. Harley had yet to actually go visit Hopper at his own place and for some reason he had insisted on making the drive out to where they were living, or inviting Harley up to the station so they could order take out and hang out there.

Harley had crafted the very resourceful knack for observing others and their behaviors. She had perfected this craft since she was a child. Hopper wasn't fooling her, but she thought it wasn't her place to inject herself into his life and ask what was going on, or what he was doing that made some of his actions so secretive. There were only two reasons he would be acting as such and it was either police business, or he had a lady companion that no one knew about. Neither of which Harley had any desire to go poking around in.

She didn't want to muddle in Hopper's private affairs, be it work or personal.

However, she found it odd that Hopper had tiptoed around the subject of reading material one day while she helped Hopper organize some old case files for extra allowance money.

"Did you ever like that Harper Hall series, or the ones by that woman, Madeleine, something or other?"

Harley had looked at him with a raised upon hearing the random question.

"You mean Madeleine L'Engle? Yeah, I suppose when I was a bit younger. Kept me busy. But I much preferred the horrors or macabre stuff."

Hopper let out a breathy huff of a laugh at her words, nodding as if he remembered. "You were always into that weird stuff, huh?"

Harley couldn't help but grin widely, nodding in return at his statement. He wasn't wrong. She loved the grittier reads, and things that were not necessarily suitable for a girl her age. Harley had grown partial to such things, which is why Halloween was her absolute favorite time of the year.

"Why you ask?" Harley pulled a file from the drawer, flipping through the case file and setting it down to re-label with legible handwriting. Hopper's handwriting was like a doctor's script.

"Nothing really. I-uh, just curious. I might have some old books stashed away in storage. Thought I might give them to Joyce and see

if Will would like them."

Harley noticed the way Hopper met her gaze, careful not to avert his eyes in a direction that might indicate he was lying. He had perfected that since being an officer of the law. He offered a small, tight smile beneath that gruff exterior of his and Harley nodded.

"Well, if I can recall, the leads in most of her books were girls, but since they have fantasy and dragons in them I doubt Will would mind," She paused, and added with smirk, "Give the kid some books to get to his mom. Nice play, Uncle Hopper."

Harley caught on fairly early in relocating to Hawkins that there was something of a spark between Hopper and Joyce Byers. She didn't know if it transpired during the time Will was missing, or if there had been something way long ago before Harley was born, but she did know that something was there, even if it was something the two would never act on.

She had been with Hopper one afternoon as they cruised to grab some donuts and coffee one Sunday since he had a case report to write up at the station, and low and behold Joyce was walking with Will out of the local donut shop. The brief re-introduction of Harley being back in town wasn't the awkward part.

The awkward part was being forced to watch, painfully, as Hopper and Joyce tiptoed around one another like two school kids that liked one another but refused to act on it, only to create those awkward tense moments when they would see each other.

"I'm not tryin' to get to no one. Shut it, kid, and get back to work."

Hopper had turned swiftly in his chair away from Harley and that was the end of that conversation.

As the weeks drew on, Harley and her mother briefly spoke each day, but there was a tense undertone to each conversation that they had. Harley found it stifling to be in the same vicinity as her. Her mother had gone on a few job interviews in the first week they had acclimated back to Hawkins, but she always had some piss poor excuse as to why she didn't want to take the offer. Finally, her mother

ended up landing a job with none other than Joyce Byers at Melvald's General Store.

She had absolutely no idea why her mother had turned down an assistant position with the local paper versus picking up a job at a store, but she didn't say anything. Harley found it was no point to try and figure out the workings of her mother's mind. She had a sneaking suspicion her mother didn't want to work with a room full of sexist men at the local paper, but who the hell knew.

Harley found it surprising she was able to pick back up at Hawkins High School with little effort. Not many knew who she was, nor did they remember her, but the moment she had been seen with Steve, Nancy and a few other prominent figures at Hawkins, more people approached and said hello to her as she walked the hallways. Harley could care less, honestly, but it at least made the transition easier knowing she could walk into Hawkins High without the worries of running into a tough crowd that would have the sassy fire breathing soul within her come out.

Well, it was mostly an easy transition.

A few whispers could be heard at times about her mother and how she was related to Chief Hopper, especially from the few students that actually did remember her. However, Harley would meet this criticism like the hot-headed red head she was and challenge them to say it louder, which would lead the kids to duck their head in fear and act as if they weren't just talking about her.

Harley could be intimidating when she wanted to and it proved useful when other kids were being complete asshats. She never did tolerate people talking about her right in front of her as if she couldn't hear it. Fiona Thompson had caught Harley in a fowl mood one day, and her little assenine comments about Harley being a snitch for her Uncle had sent Fiona and Harley to the Principal.

Apparently, you weren't allowed to throw people up against the locker and threaten them with violence. Harley had been suspended for a day, but Fiona had gotten off without so much as a slap on the wrist. Harley had gotten an ear full from Hopper, and since then she had toned down her fiery attitude ever so slightly.

The only questionable people that she had really kept at arms-length were Lacey and Leon's group. Lacey and Leon were the type of people you kept around for purposes of not getting on their bad side, and that was something she figured out after last night when she was kicking it with them at the local bar and grill. She didn't think she'd be able to get in after the ten o'clock cut off for eighteen and under folks. She was surprised when Leon had ushered her inside past the gruff looking door man, who didn't so much as look her way.

It was quite busy for a Sunday night.

People were loud at the bar, others were playing pool in the dark and dank corner of the falling apart hole in the wall establishment. According to the siblings, they had the hook up at the bar and could come hang out and mingle anytime they wanted because the owner of the place was a friend of theirs. Harley soon learned friend actually meant *customer*, and that the siblings peddled drugs to many of the more prominent people in town.

Harley had watched soundlessly, and without judgement, as the siblings quietly slipped the owner of Hawkins Bar and Grill, Greg Galinsky, a mini zip lock bag full of an assortment of white pulls. It was done within the handshake Greg gave to Leon, a sly smile upon their lips as Greg pulled away and slipped the prescription pills into his pocket.

Didn't they know who her Uncle was?

Harley figured out rather quickly that this whole show of bravado from the siblings was a test of her friendship and trust. It was a rather bold and risky test of her trust, but the siblings radiated a don't give a shit attitude, and she had a feeling they were more confident in their business and what they did than they appeared.

The company they kept was less than stellar as a few people came by to say hi, and each guy that gazed at her in the booth had convict or delinquent written all over them. Harley wasn't really scared of much, but the company they kept made her uneasy. She knew without a doubt that if she were a snitch and ratted the siblings out to Hopper she'd be paid a visit by one of these dudes. No doubt about that.

In the dim lighting, Greg had no idea who Harley was, and the siblings had introduced her as Harley, completely ditching her last name altogether as not to spook Greg by revealing she was Hopper's niece. When Greg walked away, Lacey looked over at Harley with a very calm demeanor, "You cool, biker girl?"

She flashed yellow stained teeth at her before looking down at Harley's black leather jacket. Harley nodded in return and shrugged, "I'm cool as a cucumber."

Lacey found this funny and giggled shamelessly for a few minutes. Harley had a feeling she had smoked before arriving because her eyes were blood shot and she giggled like a schoolgirl, which was completely unlike Lacey's devil may care attitude. Harley would be lying if she didn't feel some kind of way as the prescription drugs were passed so easily from one hand to another. Her mother briefly came to mind as someone who was ruining her life on pills.

However, Harley didn't come to Hawkins to cause trouble with two teens. They had seemed in a bad way with their foster home, and they were desperate to make money anyway they could. Leon glanced at Harley and slid her the ashtray, pulling out a cigarette brand that Billy had always smoked, handing it to her as she took it politely from his black painted nails.

"My sis and I gotta' do what we can to survive out here in this damn town. When you got foster parents that don't give a rats ass if you get a next meal, we turned to other ways of making money."

Lacey nodded in agreement, her widened eyes rounding even more as she glanced at Harley with a small playful pout of her cracked lips, "It's a hard knock life for us."

For some reason Harley found this funny, and pretty soon the three were chuckling in the dimly lit booth, laughing at one another's pain as the three exchanged stories about their lives and the shitty people who had been raising them.

Now that it was Monday morning, school was upon her. The weekend had come and past so quickly. But they always did when she was busy. Harley was currently in the kitchen, eating the bowl of oats she

had poured for herself as her mother chain smoked her second cigarette of the morning.

Her mother wasn't using her prescriptions as often as Harley had seen her in the past, but she was still using and that was enough for Harley to feel a resentment towards her mother for not having the balls to quit her habit and grow up.

"Harley, I want you home early this evening." Her mother's words slipped out as she scrubbed her bowl in the less than stellar sink. It was old and cracked, which further proved Harley's theory that this place was on its last leg and needed a hell of a lot of re-modeling. Harley dried the bowl as she placed it more loudly than she should have in the strainer.

"Sure."

It was all Harley offered her mother, to which she sighed and mashed out her cigarette in black ashtray that looked like it had come from a restaurant.

"I heard strange noises coming from the woods last night, and I couldn't sleep. I got worried about you being out there all alone." Her mother's voice took on that woe is me tone, the higher pitched octave she would use when she whined or played victim. Harley was surprised to hear that her mother spoke of something unrelated from complaining. It was *concern* for her daughter's well-being.

Well, this was new.

However, her mother claiming she heard strange noises from the woods that bordered the farm was like hearing her mother say she saw a werewolf out her window with glowing red eyes. Her mother hallucinated in the past when she was high, and Harley had heard it all. This time was no different. Harley rolled her eyes so her mother wouldn't see before she composed herself to respond.

"Are you sure you weren't high?"

Her mother huffed and rolled her eyes right back at Harley, pushing her red beehive bun up on her head as if using her nervous energy to

fix her hair. Harley became skeptical of her claims. She could see that nervous glint to her mother's eyes as she used those same hands to smooth over the outfit she had to wear for Melvald's General Store. She looked like she was going to a fashion show with the plaster of makeup she had caked on her face. Didn't she know she was going to bag groceries and stock shelves? She looked ready for a catwalk instead of work.

Harley, on the other hand, was dressed exactly as she should be for school. She wore dark acid washed grey jeans that tightened as they tapered to her ankle, a washed-out black pair of Vans, and a white band shirt that reflected the popular group Motley Crue. Her black leather jacket awaited her in the passenger seat of her Mustang.

She clicked her tongue, "Yes, Harley. I'm sure," Her mother paused, before eyeing Harley wearily, "I thought I saw something out in the woods too."

Harley leaned against the kitchen counter, the cracked sink behind her made a creaking noise and she had to glance back at it to make sure the damn thing hadn't splintered again.

"Well, which is it? You heard strange noises, or you saw something? And did it look like a werewolf?" Harley lamented with a smirk as her mother got slightly irritated with her attitude.

Her mother grated the old wooden chair on the floor as she got up, making a racket as she did and then forcefully shoving the chair back under the table. Her mother placed her hands on the back after stubbing out her cigarette with an anxious fervor. She was shaking her head, and Harley noticed the unfavorable amount of wrinkles in her forehead as she furrowed her brows.

"I know what I saw." Her mother rebuked hotly as she swiped the keys to her station wagon off the steel hook next to the front door, grabbing her purse, and jetting off to work. Harley watched her pull out of the drive before rolling her eyes. Her mother claimed a lot of things when she was on a trip. This wasn't anything new.

She brushed her teeth and then grabbed her backpack, slinging it over her right shoulder before grabbing her own car keys off the

same hook, careful to lock the door behind her. She didn't know why she bothered. They lived near Merrill's pumpkin farm, which was on the outskirts of Hawkins. She doubted anyone would want to ransack this dilapidated house anyhow.

After walking to her car, she paused by the front fender, her emerald green eyes staring out at the edge of the woods that backed up to Merrills property. Her eyes tightened for a moment as she the wind whispered around her hair.

For a moment, she stood transfixed on the property line where the half dead grass ended, and the tree line began. She swallowed as the eerie silence produced a tremor down her back. Before she thought better of it, she tossed her backpack into the back seat of her car and started walking towards the woods.

Her footsteps crunched on the dry half-dead grass, her eyes never leaving tree line as something pulled her towards the woods. The air smelled of smoke and something putrid, as if someone in the distance was burning trash. She had walked more than halfway across when the sound of a twig snapping made her jump, but upon looking down she realized she had been the one to step on it.

"You're an idiot, Harley. It's just a twig." She mumbled mostly to herself as she neared the edge of the grass where it ended.

Her eyes looked into the void of the woods, from left to right and then right to left as if she expected to find something out there. She didn't believe her mom by any stretch, but she certainly felt a pull towards the woods and the eerie tremor that crept down her spine was really hard to ignore. Her eyes had seen enough as the silence around her became too much to handle.

She swallowed thickly past a lump that had formed her in throat, which had suddenly become extremely parched and dry. When she took a step back her eyes for some reason looked down at her feet and there in the dirt before the grass began were solid looking prints.

Four to be exact.

She crouched down and looked at them for a moment, her hand

fidgiting by her side as she wanted to touch the tracks in the dirt, but she chickened out. The tracks were strange, albeit a little smeared, but she couldn't tell if there were three or four appendages, and each one was long, as if it had slender fingers or claw-like appendages.

"Probably just coyote tracks that got smeared or something." She murmured, tying her best to make light of the very unique claw-like tracks she was staring at.

A resounding snap could be heard somewhere deep within the woods, which had Harley maneuvering out of her crouched position, instantly taking a huge step back after she had stood up. Something in her bones had her walking backward a few steps before she briskly turned around on her shoes and started jogging back towards her car at a much faster pace.

Harley dared a glance over her right shoulder towards the clearing as she rounded her car to the driver door. She anticipated a red eyed wolf staring at her, but saw nothing instead. It was all silent.

Harley climbed in and started her car before pulling out of the driveway and heading to school. It wasn't until she was a mile or two down the road from her house that she noticed her knuckles were pale white as they gripped the steering wheel, and the only thing she could think about was the strangest feeling that she was being *watched* by something out in the woods.

Maybe, just maybe, her mother wasn't so crazy, after all.

Harley managed to catch a glimmer of the whispers in the bathroom before her fourth period English class. There were hushed giggles as two of the Hawkins cheerleaders gushed about a new boy that had arrived mid-morning.

Apparently, the newcomer caught the fancy of some of the girls at Hawkins. She washed her hands as the girls talked to each other from one from one stall to another, their high-pitched voices grating against Harley's ears like nails on a chalkboard.

"Did you see his hair?"

"I bet he's good in bed."

Harley had no idea who they were talking about, but she also didn't care. She rolled her eyes at the two girls who had no shame but to pass thoughts about a new boy back and forth. She high-tailed it out of the bathroom before they came out of the stalls. Upon leaving the girls bathroom she found herself crashing into Jonathan Byers, who dropped his binder in the scuffle.

"Shit." Harley murmured before bending down at the same time as Jonathan, which resulted in the two clanking their heads together.

"Ow." Jonathan mumbled, holding his head with his left hand while Harley picked up his binder with her free hand. She handed it to him as they stood up together with scarlet tinted cheeks from the whole incident. She didn't know Jonathan that well, but he was fairly quiet and kept to himself. She had spoken to him on occasion, but their conversations had never been more than formal greetings and small talk.

"Sorry, Jonathan." Harley responded with a sheepish grin as he tucked the binder against his chest, covering up his camera. His smile dimpled a little and he brushed a few stray strands of hair away from his face.

He looked at her smiled hesitantly, "It's my fault. Should have been paying attention."

There was a flurry of students that walked the hall as the only had minutes to their next class. She gave him a wry smile, "I hope my mom isn't causing too much trouble for Joyce at the store."

Jonathan smiled bashfully, which was in his nature it seemed, and shook his head, "No complaints yet."

Harley nodded, "Good because I take no responsibility for that woman's actions."

Jonathan laughed, averting his eyes down to his worn-out sneakers and then back up at Harley. "I think she'll work out. My mom could use the help honestly." He offered a smile that crinkled at the edges

of his soft eyes. She had no idea the terror that Jonathan and Joyce had gone through trying to find Will, and she honestly never wanted to know.

Harley realized they were almost out of time to get to class as the warning bell sounded over the crackled PA system, "Well, that's the warning bell. See ya around, and nice camera!"

He nodded his head at her with a surprised smile before ducking his head back down and disappearing into the crowd. Jonathan was a nice kid, but he was super quiet at times and it made Harley nervous. Not because she was nervous of him or anything, but his shy demeanor made her nervous. She didn't know what to say to people that were as introverted as Jonathan.

She was fully aware of Nancy's sordid feelings for Jonathan, which she had confessed during one of her letters she had sent Harley. Since Nancy had confided in her, Harley had trustingly told Nancy about Billy. They had talked over pizza and studying for a quiz, and Nancy had listened with rapt attention as she told her about the incident on the beach and how it led to a heated and passionate Summer.

Harley had a full thirty seconds to spare as she walked into English, gliding past the desks of students before taking hers in the back by the window. Steve Harrington was already in his desk, which was right in front of her. He turned around as she plopped down, setting her backpack by her feet and opening it to grab her notepad and folder. She whipped out two sheets of notes that were stapled together and before Steve could utter a word Harley was already talking.

"I made notes for you because I know Romeo and Juliet isn't your style, Harrington. This should get you through the open note quiz today."

Steve was not exactly the best note taker and though Harley didn't like the idea of letting kids cheat or copy off her, she wasn't against making double notes for Steve. He was lucky Nancy was so smitten about the *King of Hawkins* because if it was any other dude Harley probably would have told him to take his own damn notes.

"You are a life saver, Harley Hopper. How can I repay you?" He offered her a polite smile as his right hand took the notes and his left hand held on to the back of his desk.

"You could repay me by taking notes like a normal student."

Steve blew out a breath and ran his left hand through his pompous locks before shaking his head, "Dude, I suck at taking notes. It's engrained in my DNA." Harley smirked, but she could tell that Steve was actually a bit concerned with his note taking skills. It made sense though. They were both in their Senior year and this was the time that students got serious about their studies and figured out if they were going to finally be free of Hawkins with a scholarship or be stuck here forever.

"You suck at it because you don't try, Harrington. Practice doesn't make perfect, but it sure as shit makes progress."

He flashed a smile at her, but not before rolling his eyes at simultaneously.

As class began, Steve turned in his desk and slouched back against his seat. The class hushed as their teacher, Mrs. Weaver, started to stand up at her desk, wiping her frail hands on her flower printed white dress. Mrs. Weaver paired it with a old people loafers that were nude in color. Her ensemble was the epitome of cute, but comfy. She had a bob of grey hair and purple rimmed little glasses upon her heart shaped face.

Harley wasn't a student pet, but Mrs. Weaver had bonded with Harley since she started here over literature. She found out that Mrs. Weaver was a closet fan of horror too.

She walked to the door, lifting up the door stopper on the end and allowing it to shut, but a hand against the door and a flash of denim with a mullet styled haircut waltzed through the closing door, shoving it open casually as Mrs. Weaver paused mid-way back to her desk to look at the newcomer.

Harley felt her stomach flip as the last person who she ever expected to walk through the doors of Hawkins High School had come strolling

in as they already owned the damn place. He wore an outfit of denim on denim, paired with a plain white V-neck t-shirt, a small wire notebook in his right hand a mullet that made her knees quiver.

Billy freaking Hargrove.

This is a dream. This isn't real.

She had to blink twice and pinch her right arm to make sure she was still not at home dreaming. His eyes were settled on Mrs. Weaver, not yet sweeping the classroom yet. Harley found herself frozen, unable to move an inch. Mrs. Weaver turned to face him, placing her hands in front of her dress before raising a brow.

"I'm guessing you're the new transfer?"

Billy smirked, looking down at Mrs. Weaver with a very charming smile while taking a small step towards her and handing her the slip of paper he was to show his teachers in each new class. Harley knew this because she had been the most recent transfer kid in Hawkins, and she had to show the slip to every teacher the first day.

Her mind was still trying to process everything that was happening. The what, when and why were circulating in her mind on a rotation. There was no way Billy had followed her all the way to freaking Hawkins, but there was a super tiny part of her fantasy that wanted so much for that to be true, no matter how outlandish it sounded.

"Yes m'a'am." His voice was smooth as velvet and Mrs. Weaver gave him a small once over before raising a brow and taking his slip. She looked it over for a moment as Billy started to look towards the classroom of students. Harley found herself sinking into her seat, but before his eyes trailed towards her side of the room Mrs. Weaver was handing him the paper back.

"Mr. Hargrove take a seat in the empty desk next to Harley. She's also our other most recent transfer," She paused and added with a flare of her nostrils, "And take that cigarette out from behind your ear, Mr. Hargrove. I don't care what you do outside this classroom, but I don't even want to see it in my room. You hear?"

He nodded, taking the cigarette out from behind his ear and tossing it in the trash as he murmured aloud with a passive gaze, "Whatever you say, Mrs. Weaver."

He then offered her a grin that made the old teacher look at him warily. Mrs. Weaver was already seeing the bad boy signs written all over Billy, which meant everyone else in the classroom had as well. Harley let out a small involuntarily squeak within her throat at the mention of her name. Her eyes were wide, and her mouth was slightly agape.

Steve turned around to look at her upon her squeak, which was very uncharacteristic of her. She glimpsed Steve's questioning gaze as he looked from her to Billy and then back to her.

"Do you know this tool?" He whispered lowly as his brows furrowed.

Harley could only give a small curt nod of her head as Steve turned in his desk and slouched down again. She had a feeling Steve might have already had a class with Billy because he didn't seem too thrilled that Billy was in this class too. The Earth stood still for a singular moment as Billy's face showed the briefest glimmer of vulnerability. His eyes had already landed upon her fiery red hair and her shrinking form as her heartbeat sped up like a runaway train.

Billy's eyes were fixated upon Harley and the shock was written over his slack jawed face. She swore he even took a tiny step backwards, as if disbelief had consumed his entire being. However, being the playboy he was, he recovered so quickly that she wondered if anyone else in the room had noticed.

Billy took the slip from Mrs. Weaver, giving her a Cheshire grin before walking with a cool swagger that had all the girls in the classroom eyeing him appreciatively. He even smiled at a few, and he even went so far as winking at Fiona Thompson who giggled. Harley envisioned wringing Fiona's neck, or putting gum into her curly blonde hair, but quickly pushed that thought from her mind.

Her eyes continued to watch Billy as he made way down the row of desk, closer and closer...closer and closer..until he was beside Steve. He nudged Steve in his shoulder and smirked.

"Sup, King Steve."

The way he said Steve's name was almost juvenile, as if knowing full well he annoyed the hell out of Steve. She knew without a doubt they had a class together before this, possibly even gym because Steve didn't look at all happy to be bothered by Billy.

Billy smirked as he walked past, slipping into the desk beside Harley and she almost felt faint. He was acting calm and casual, trying his best not to give away his true emotion of shock. He put on a mask mere moments before slipping into his desk, but once he sat down, she knew without looking at him that he was staring at her. Harley froze in her desk and risked sneaking a glance over at Billy, whose eyes were already planted directly on her as she had guessed.

His face was a raw mixture of emotion for a second. Those eyes stared at her with disbelief, passion, and possibly even something like pain. There was an intensity to his gaze that made her belly swarm with butterflies, and maybe even a little trepidation.

She swallowed, finding her voice past the thick lump in her throat as she whispered lowly, "Hi, Billy."

He was still staring at her, his angst-ridden eyes softening for a heartbeat of a second, before Mrs. Weaver's frail voice spoke aloud,

"Class we have another transfer. I doubt I need to tell you all to make Billy Hargrove feel welcomed in our classroom. Mr. Hargrove, consider this your only easy day. I'll get you the assigned reading and textbook after class."

The moment they had shared was over and Billy resigned to staring at a fixed spot somewhere towards the front of the classroom. He hadn't even said hello, and Harley felt a twinge of hurt course through her veins. She bit lower lip, and for once in a very long time, Harley Hopper had to fight the sting of tears that threatened to leak out. She composed herself as quietly as she could.

Harley Hopper wasn't a big crier.

It wasn't in her blood.

"Now class, it's time for our open note quiz over Friday's lesson, and-"

Her voice trailed off and Harley found it very hard to listen at all. She mechanically moved around her desk, shuffling inside her backpack for a pen as she splayed out the notes to her left and opened her notebook to a fresh page. All of Mrs. Weaver's quizzes were short answer form, and she always wrote the questions on the board for some reason.

Harley felt her right hand was already slick with a mild sticky sheen of sweat from her nerves. Not from the quiz, but from Billy Hargrove sitting beside her in the flesh, and very much here in Hawkins as a new transfer.

Did that mean Max was with him as well?

It didn't matter how hard she concentrated on Mrs. Weaver in class that day, she couldn't focus. Her stomach flip flopped as Billy casually tapped his pen on his desk at a low rhythm that only she would hear, and the only thing she could think of was the same way those rough hands would strum his guitar in a familiar rhythm. Her mind was a muddled mess for the rest of the period.

She didn't think class would ever end, but when the bell rang she actually let out a breath of relief.

"Thanks again for these." Steve mentioned, to which Harley nodded and politely told him he wasn't a big deal. She was acutely aware of Billy glaring daggers at Steve for a brief moment as he spoke to Harley.

"Harley? Billy? Could you stay after for a minute? I'll write you both passes for your next period, but it shouldn't take long." She looked at Mrs. Weaver, and for some reason she looked at Billy who had raised an annoyed brow at having to stay back.

He grabbed his small wire notepad and strolled casually to the front. Steve and Harley got up together, but where Steve left the classroom, Harley was left behind to stand awkwardly against a desk that was directly in front of Mrs. Weaver's table at the front. Billy chose the desk next to hers to lean against, and she swore she could feel the

crackle of tension between their two bodies as if it were physically tangible to hold onto.

"What's this about?" Harley asked, pulling her backpack higher up onto her right shoulder as Billy stood mute, looking aloof and very bored.

"Harley, I want you to help Billy catch up on the assigned reading." Mrs. Weaver must have noticed the dreaded silence that overcame the two students, especially as Harley fidgeted with her backpack strap.

"You know the reading better than anyone, dear. You're the only student in this class that actually gives well thought out answers for our quizzes."

"What's the assigned reading?" Billy asked, but his tone was less than thrilled as he raised a skeptical eyebrow.

"Romeo and Juliet." Mrs. Weaver stated as she walked around her desk and started to rummage through a stack of books in a large filing cabinet that was the width of two of her desks put together.

"I love a good romance." Billy responded with a heavy note of sarcasm, his smirk pulled up to reveal those two heartstopping dimples.

"It's more like a romantic tragedy, not a romance." Harley countered quietly.

"You'd know all about that." Billy passed to her with a dour gaze as Mrs. Weaver pulled out the assigned reading with a triumph sound. She hadn't heard a word they said to each other as she was too busy digging through all the old assigned readings from years prior. Harley glared at Billy before Mrs. Weaver turned back around to see her.

"I knew I had more copies in here." She walked around her desk slowly, as if all the rifling through the file cabinets had winded her. She handed it to Billy and he took it, glancing at it and then shoving it under his right armpit. She got a small whiff of his spicy cologne as he moved his arms to shove the book under his right arm.

Harley was instantly brought back to Long Beach night's in his Camaro.

This wasn't exactly the greeting she had expected from him, but then again he hadn't seen her off when she left. He hadn't even come to say goodbye that last day. She could remember how angry and cold his eyes had grown when she said she was following her mom to Indiana.

"Now, here are some passes for your next period. Make time this week, whenever, before or after school. Billy, I expect you to be caught up on the assigned reading sooner than later. It's a required text for our class."

Her stern nature was only heard in her tone, but her eyes were soft and inviting. She was a sweet old woman, and when she tried to sound imposing or authoritative, she mostly failed. Harley just smiled thinly, nodded and Billy shrugged lightly, as if that was the only response he wanted to give. Harley had a feeling Billy didn't want to do any kind of schoolwork whatsoever.

Her next class started to pour in, giving the two of them quizzical glances as they stood before Mrs. Weaver as if they had just been given a lecture. Harley ducked her head, grabbing her slip to show to her next period teacher before feeling Billy's presence close behind her. She scooted past a small handful of kids that were loitering next to Mrs. Weavers class, as did Billy. The group disbanded and a few went into Mrs. Weaver's class and the others went to Mr. Tanner's across the hall, leaving the hallway completely empty and very quiet as next period had already started.

She was thankful Mrs. Weaver had given them late passes because she was about to use the opportunity to try and talk to Billy.

Harley turned around quickly, opened her mouth to speak and then shut it. Billy had given her a cold greeting and now she didn't know what to say. She was used to his harsh mood swings he could have, but this was something different. This was hurtful in a different kind of way.

He leaned casually against someone's locker and stared at her as if

they were at a crossroads.

"So, Hawkins, huh?" She started the conversation, albeit a bit awkwardly.

He huffed, blowing out a breath through his nose and rolled his eyes, clearly not happy with his current predicament. "This place is a shit hole."

"Hey, I was born here." Harley countered hotly.

"Doesn't mean it's not a shit hole." Billy responded blandly.

There was a moment of silence between them and Harley found the courage to speak what was on her mind during class.

"I can't believe you're actually here," She whispered as her heart pumped soundlessly to an invisible fast-paced beat that only she could hear in her ears.

"Why Hawkins? And is Max here?"

Billy looked at her stone-faced, clearly not happy they were in Hawkins instead of Long Beach.

"If it was my decision we wouldn't even be here," He bit out with that careless gaze that passed over her. For some reason, her heart started to pound more slowly, as if the excitement was starting to dwindle away. Billy never had no intention of finding her or contacting her again.

"My dad's choice, and yeah she's here. Annoying as ever with her stupid obsession with that arcade place this weekend."

She furrowed her brows, realizing that Billy and Max had been here for a couple days already. It was a wonder she hadn't even seen him. Harley all of a sudden got a distinct feeling that Billy didn't want to be around her. She felt her stomach drop out from within her, as if it had fallen straight through body.

"Where does this leave us?" The words sounded foreign on her own tongue and she hated feeling vulnerable at his expense. At anyone's

expense, honestly. But here she was feeling unsure and very uncomfortable before Billy Hargrove, the boy who she had very much cared for.

Hell, she fancied she could have even loved him, but Harley didn't know much about love and relationships. Billy had been the first boy that made her feel things that went beyond a grade school crush.

He must have sensed the way she was looking at him. Must have seen the way she had gleamed a small hopeful look in her eyes moments ago before the conversation had stalled.

"Sorry to disappoint, but I didn't come here for you, Harley."

The words hurt even though she was anticipating it, but hearing it from his mouth didn't make it sting any less. If anything it stung more. Looking at him closely, she could see the war in his irises as he spoke. There were conflicting feelings etched upon his face as his eyes dipped down Harley's body and then back up to her face slowly as if reliving memories from the past Summer.

Memories that included her lithe little body pressed against his as she peppered sweet kisses up and down jaw.

Truth was, neither of them were over one another.

They didn't know where it left them, but Billy's best defense was to act harsh and cold so he could cover up his feelings. He didn't want to seem weak at Hawkins High, and if were to make a name for himself this Senior year he needed to play the bad boy part.

After all, it was what everyone expected of him anyways.

So why give them anything different?

Harley looked up at him and shook her head, more so at herself than at him, "I just thought that since you were here-"

"Things would go back to the way they were?" Billy finished her sentence for her, causing Harley to meet his gaze. He looked away from her for a moment, down at his shoes and then up at her, his face grew shrewder. It was nothing like the pompous and snarky Billy she

knew back in California. He blew out a breath through his nostrils. He was the one now that shook his head back and forth as if Harley was slow in getting a memo she had somehow missed.

"You left. Remember?" His voice had an edge to it and his warring eyes flashed with a flicker of anger. He pushed off the metal locker with his right foot and took an intimidating step towards Harley. She rooted herself to her spot, not stepping back an inch which gave him the upper hand in this mental mind game he was trying to play with her. If she stepped back, Billy would know he had gotten to her.

"You left *me*."

There it was. That singular word. *Me*.

Said with such a selfish conviction that Harley almost stepped back, but she caught herself. With Billy this close she could see the way his eyes flickered with hurt. She could smell the spicy cologne and hairspray that wafted off him. This close she could feel the heat and see the fine details in his denim jacket. This close...Harley still wanted to kiss him.

But she didn't because a bubbling outrage was simmering in her gut. An outrage towards Billy for making it seem as if she left on her own accord. Her mother moved. She followed. It was the nature of her life, and Billy knew that from the get-go. She had teased him relentlessly that she didn't want him to fall in love with her. And every single time she said as much Billy would just smirk, averting his gaze from her while subtly claiming that it wasn't really his style.

Harley wondered now if maybe, just maybe, Billy Hargrove had been falling in love with her when they were back in Long Beach. But standing here with him now, with that intimidating stance and his dispassionate eyes, she found it hard to believe that Billy could ever feel that way about her. Then or now.

Suddenly, she didn't feel like she wanted to kiss him anymore. Not when he had such a calculated cruelty in his eyes.

"You act like I had a choice!" She countered in a shrill voice before looking around the empty hallway to make sure no one was around.

"You could've stayed." Billy countered shrewdly.

There was a moment of silence as the implication of his words. Harley hefted her backpack up on her right shoulder as she gave him a dubious look. She laughed with a sarcastic huff, and before she could think better of it she responded with a questionable gaze, "You mean with you?"

It came out all wrong. She didn't mean to huff out that sarcastic laugh the way she did. She just didn't understand how that would have been possible. His father was a complete jerk, and he wouldn't have allowed Harley to stay with them. Coupled with the fact that her own mother was still a burden on her shoulders that she continued to put up with out of obligation. Billy had never liked that Harley felt such a strong obligation to take care of her mother. She knew he hated it.

Billy's face had frozen over like frost growing over a window in the dead of winter. She didn't mean for her words to be taken in the wrong way, but it was too late. And the hateful part of Harley didn't care because as much coldness as he was dishing out maybe it was time he had a taste of his own medicine.

"Just forget it. None of it matters now anyways." Billy spat with a furrowed brow.

These had been the words that nailed Billy's coffin shut. At least in Harley's heart it had. It doesn't matter now anyways meant they didn't matter now, and that everything that had transpired in California didn't matter. It meant that going forward, Billy wanted nothing more than to forget it all. It meant he didn't care. And that hurt. It was a crippling hurt that finally sent Harley taking a small step back as if she had been slapped.

Sure, she told Billy not to get too close, and that she moved a lot, but hearing him act as if nothing that happened between mattered cut her more deeply than she had anticipated. She still felt as if she had been physically slapped. Harley quickly turned her own hurt into anger as she always did when someone upset her. Her nostrils flared in defense mode as the fire breathing red headed dragon within her reared it's ugly head.

"You know what? You can get someone else to catch you up on the assigned reading,"

He tightened his eyes at her as she glared at him hotly.

"Because if none of it matters then we really have nothing more to say to each other." Harley added harshly as Billy's face contorted between angst and rage.

Without so much as another word, Harley turned in her shoes and started walking to fifth period, her hands were shaking now as adrenaline flooded her veins. She didn't give him the satisfaction of seeing her turn around to look him. Harley kept walking until she got to the end of the hallway where she needed to turn left, but before she did, she heard a very loud and resonating sound of something slamming into a metal locker.

Harley didn't have to turn around to know that Billy's fist had just collided with someone's locker out of frustration and anger. The moment she turned left she saw the girl's restroom and hurried in.

After making sure no one was in there, she walked into the furthest stall and closed the door, sinking low against the side of the stall and dropping her backpack by her side. For the first time in a very long time, Harley emptied a silent river of tears into the palms of her hands.

Author's Note: Well, first thing's first. BILLY IS FREAKING HERE. But it isn't exactly the greeting Harley anticipated. Billy is just being angsty Billy. I feel like he was trying to get over her and then BAM he runs into her and he doesn't know how to feel about it. And the abandonment issue he has with his mom coincides with feeling abandoned by Harley leaving California. Oh, and you might be wondering what kind of tracks she found in the woods. I don't want give TOO much away but there MIGHT be two demodogs running around Hawkins. Dustin finds a baby..but who is to say there couldn't be another adult demodogs running around? We will just have to wait and see hehe Also, I like the playful banter between Steve and Harley. XD